

# ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY®

M A G A Z I N E

JULY 1993

## BODY BY THE CREEK

A Sheriff Meg Boniface Story

by  
**STEPHEN  
WASYLYK**

**PLUS**  
MORE NEW STORIES  
OF MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE

\$2.25 U.S./\$2.95 C.



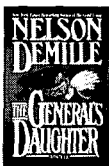
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



4242 \$19.95/\$9.98



4234 \$18.95/\$9.98



4150\* \$21.95/\$12.98



4184 \$21.95/\$12.98

# MURDER

(6 books for 99¢ with membership)

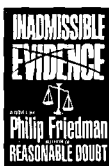
It's easy to make a killing with *Mystery Guild*®. First, slip the sharpest scissors out of the drawer. Then, ever so quietly, cut out the coupon below. Finish it off with a pen (caution: do *not* use invisible ink). Tonight, you can start slashing as much as 60% off publishers' edition prices. Become a partner in crime with *Mystery Guild*!



4226 \$17.95/\$9.98



2469 \$21.95/\$12.98



4168 \$23.00/\$13.98



4077 \$21.00/\$9.98



4069 \$19.95/\$9.98



4085 \$20.00/\$9.98



4101 \$21.00/\$9.98



3699 \$23.00/\$10.98

## HERE'S WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU JOIN...

**A GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION.** Once your membership's accepted, we'll send the 6 BOOKS you've chosen plus your FREE CLUB TOTE. If you're not 100% satisfied with the books, return them within 10 days at our expense. Membership will be canceled and you'll owe nothing. The Club Tote is your free gift to keep.

**HUGE DISCOUNTS ON HARDCOVER BOOKS.** Save as much as 60% off publishers' edition prices. Club books are sometimes altered in size to fit special presses.

**THE FREE CLUB MAGAZINE.** You'll receive up to 16 issues a year. Each issue reviews the Featured Book Selections plus a wide variety of books from the Club's extensive library.

**SHOPPING MADE SIMPLE.** To get the Featured Book Selections, do nothing—they will be sent automatically. If you prefer another book—or none at all—simply return your Member Reply Form by the specified date. A shipping and handling charge (and sales tax, where applicable) is added to each order.

**AN EASY-TO-MEET OBLIGATION.** Take up to 2 years to buy 4 more books at regular low Club prices. Afterwards, you may resign membership anytime.

**RISK-FREE RETURN PRIVILEGES.** If you get an unwanted book because your Club magazine was delayed and you had less than 10 days to respond, simply return the book at our expense.

Prices in fine print are for publishers' editions.

Prices in bold print are for Club hardcover editions.

x Hardcover edition exclusively for Club members

\* Explicit scenes and/or language



**FREE TOTE**  
with membership



4127 \$17.95/\$9.98



4135 \$20.00/\$9.98



8722 \$17.00/\$9.98



2907 \$17.98/\$9.98



5256 \$18.50/\$8.98



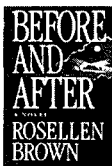
5249 \$16.95/\$8.98



5231 \$18.95/\$9.98



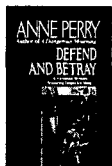
4671 \$18.95/\$8.98



4176\* \$21.00/\$12.98



2873 \$21.00/\$9.98



2451 \$18.00/\$9.98



2485 \$19.00/\$9.98



2501 \$9.98x



5058 \$20.00/\$8.98



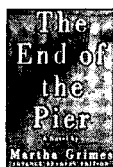
5074 \$18.95/\$9.98



2519 \$19.00/\$9.98



5165 \$19.50/\$9.98



9332 \$20.00/\$9.98



6338 \$17.95/\$8.98



7427\* \$18.95/\$9.98



4424 \$22.00/\$12.98



2477 \$19.00/\$9.98



2527 \$19.95/\$9.98



7237 \$19.00/\$9.98

# MYSTERY

## GUILD

MAIL TO: Mystery Guild  
6550 East 30th Street  
P.O. Box 6362  
Indianapolis, IN 46206-6362

Please write book numbers here:

**YES!** Please enroll me in *Mystery Guild* according to the risk-free membership plan described in this ad. Send me the 6 BOOKS I've indicated—plus my FREE CLUB TOTE. Bill me just 99¢, plus shipping and handling.

**SAVE MORE—BUY YOUR FIRST BOOK NOW FOR \$3.49**

☐ Send me the book I've indicated and reduce my commitment to only 3 more books. Bill me an additional \$3.49, plus shipping and handling.

(write book number)

--	--	--	--

38387 78\*

Mr./Mrs.

Miss/Ms. \_\_\_\_\_

(please print)

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Apt. \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

38388

79

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members serviced from Canada, where offer is slightly different. Sales tax added where applicable. We reserve the right to reject any application.

AHM 7/93

# CONTENTS



## SHORT STORIES

<b>BODY BY THE CREEK</b>	by Stephen Wasylyk	<b>6</b>
<b>HIBELIA AND THE FISH</b>	by Dan Crawford	<b>22</b>
<b>ALWAYS SOMETHING</b>	by Paul G. Reeve	<b>42</b>
<b>ISN'T IT WONDERFUL!</b>	by Frank Orenstein	<b>62</b>
<b>G-MEN AND OLD LOVES</b>	by D. L. Richardson	<b>72</b>
<b>COXLEY'S SECRET</b>	by David Braly	<b>104</b>
<b>PROFESSIONAL TOUCH</b>	by Bob Tippee	<b>115</b>
<b>SLIDING PAINT</b>	by Jeffry Scott	<b>135</b>

## MYSTERY CLASSIC

<b>THE CHOCOLATE DOG</b>	by Margery Allingham	<b>144</b>
--------------------------	----------------------	------------

## DEPARTMENTS

<b>EDITOR'S NOTES</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>UNSOLVED</b>	by Robert V. Kesling <b>100</b>
<b>SOLUTION TO THE JUNE "UNSOLVED"</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>BOOKED &amp; PRINTED</b>	by Mary Cannon <b>150</b>
<b>MURDER BY DIRECTION</b>	by William Heller <b>153</b>
<b>THE STORY THAT WON</b>	<b>155</b>

**ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE** Vol. 38, No. 7, July, 1993. Published every 28 days, which includes special issues in June and at year end, by Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines, \$2.25 per copy in the U.S.A. \$2.95 in Canada. Annual subscription \$31.97 in the U.S.A. and possessions; \$37.50 elsewhere (in Canada, GST is included) payable in advance in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 1540 Broadway, N.Y., N.Y. 10036. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 5124, Harlan, Iowa 51593-5124. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing office. Canadian 3rd class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. © 1993 by Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines, all rights reserved. The stories in this magazine are all fictitious, and any resemblance between the characters in them and actual persons is completely coincidental. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 5124, Harlan, Iowa 51593-5124. In Canada return to 3255 Wyandotte Street East, Windsor, Ontario, N8Y 1E9. GST #R123054108. **ISSN: 0002-5224.**





**TOR  
BOOKS**

DAVID POYER  
**WINTER  
IN  
THE  
HEART**



# THE BEST MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE

## WINTER IN THE HEART

DAVID POYER

"DAVID POYER'S [WINTER IN THE HEART] HAS THE RELENTLESS FORCE OF A CHOKE-HOLD. ONE OF THE YEAR'S TRULY OUTSTANDING NOVELS."—MYSTERY SCENE  
0-312-85421-8 • \$21.95 • JUNE HARDCOVER

## DEATH COMES AS EPIPHANY

SHARAN NEWMAN

"ONE OF THE MOST CONVINCING FEMINIST HISTORICAL NOVELS...A FASCINATING RECREATION OF MEDIEVAL THOUGHT."—MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY  
0-312-85419-6 • JUNE HARDCOVER

## THE COUNT OF ELEVEN

RAMSEY CAMPBELL

"IF SILENCE OF THE LAMBS AND AMERICAN PSYCHO HOLD THE MODERN SERIAL KILLER UP FOR INSPECTION, THE COUNT OF ELEVEN TAKES US RIGHT INSIDE HIS HEAD. UNMISSABLE."—THE LONDON TIMES  
0-812-52169-2 • \$4.99/\$5.99 • JUNE MASS MARKET

## MARIMBA

RICHARD HOYT

"A SUPERIOR [THRILLER]...WITH AN AMORAL FAMILY THAT WILL CHILL THE BLOOD...DOUBLE-DEALING FEDERAL DRUG AGENTS AND NONSTOP ACTION..."—THE NEW YORK TIMES  
0-812-551563-3 • \$4.99/\$5.99 • JUNE MASS MARKET

COMING IN MASS MARKET IN AUGUST—THE LATEST NOVEL  
FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF BALEFIRE—

**PREY • KEN GODDARD**

0-812-51198-0 • \$5.99/\$6.99



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

**P**aul G. Reeve, author of "Always Something," makes his fiction debut in this issue, and we are very pleased to have him with us. The story is set in Washington, D.C., and if the author seems to know whereof he writes, he does. Mr. Reeve, now a Houston English professor specializing in English Renaissance literature, has been a staff aide in the Senate and the House of Representatives and a lobbyist for an energy company based in Houston. He also spent time in the army at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, working in the Congressional Relations Branch. "It seems as though I have always written," he tells us, "but the first thing I wrote to see print in a widely distributed publication was a speech for a U.S. senator denouncing the

Brezhnev Doctrine in the *Congressional Record*."

In graduate school he "wrote a thesis on the poetry of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke (who was, incidentally, a murder victim. The butler did it—actually, the valet.)."

In his free time, Mr. Reeve usually goes to the Caribbean for scuba diving and to see the Mayan archaeological sites.

Coincidentally, Frank Orenstein, author of "Isn't It Wonderful!," his second story for AHMM, has spent time in Washington as well: he put in "four years in the U.S. State Department (Voice of America, Exchange of Persons, etc.) where I wrote memos on what I would propose doing if I didn't have to spend all my time writing memos." Mr. Orenstein is

(continued on page 134)

**Cathleen Jordan**, Editor; **Susan A. Teitz**, Editorial Assistant; **Jean Traina**, Design Director; **Terri Czezko**, Art Director; **Anthony Bari**, Junior Designer; **Marilyn Roberts**, Senior Production Manager; **Carole Dixon**, Production Manager; **Cynthia Manson**, Director of Marketing and Subsidiary Rights; **Constance Scarborough**, Contracts Manager; **Barbara Parrott**, Director of Newsstand Circulation; **Bruce Schwartz**, Director of Circulation, Subscription Sales; **Dennis Jones**, Operations Manager, Subscription Sales; **Leslie Guarnieri**, Renewal and Billing Manager, Subscription Sales; **Fred Sabloff**, Advertising Director; **Judy Dorman**, Assistant Advertising Sales Manager. **Advertising Offices, New York:** (212) 856-6306. **Advertising Representative:** Dresner Direct, Inc., New York, New York, (212) 889-1078.

**Christoph Haas-Heye**, President and Publisher, Dell Magazines  
**Jack Hoeft**, President and CEO, Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.

Just when you thought it was safe  
to go back to the rambling  
country house...

# MORE MURDER MOST COZY

More Mysteries in the Classic Tradition.

**F**ollowing up on the great success of our first volume, **MURDER MOST COZY**, this winning second edition brings stories from the same legendary masters of the cozy together again in one great collection. Baffling, intriguing, and wonderfully engaging murder returns to vicarages and villages, boarding houses and quaint seaside resorts. Solving them, of course, are mystery-lovers' favorite sleuths—eccentric elderly ladies and irascible police detectives.

## MORE MURDER MOST COZY

More Mysteries in the Classic Tradition

Agatha Christie  
P.D. James  
Ruth Rendell  
Melba Marlett  
John H. Dirckx  
Elizabeth Goudge  
Christianna Brand  
and Henry T. Parry



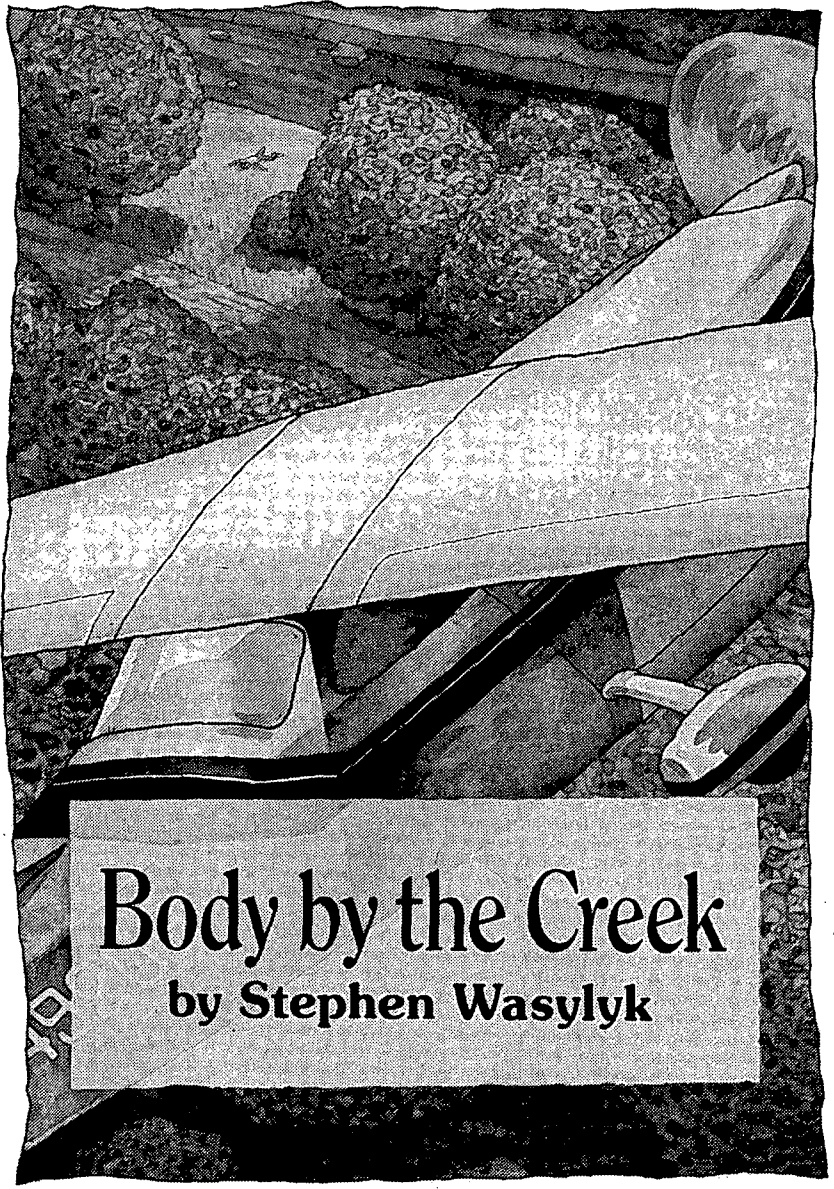
0-451-17649-9/\$3.99 (\$4.99 in Canada)

- Includes Stories by  
Such Cozy Penners as  
**AGATHA CHRISTIE,**  
**P.D. JAMES,**  
**RUTH RENDELL,**  
**ELIZABETH GOUDGE,**  
**MELBA MARLETT,**  
and **JOHN H. DIRCKX**



**SIGNET**

FICTION



# Body by the Creek

by Stephen Wasylyk

Illustration by Jim Adams

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



---

**H**is hour of solo practice almost over, Klauder leveled off at six hundred feet, lining up the Cessna with the landmarks that would take him into the landing pattern.

Something on the bank of the creek flashed by below his left wing, jolting his smugness over his precision pilotage—disturbing enough to put him into a slow turn to see if he could pick it up again.

The trees, the small bridge over the creek, the dirt road leading off the narrow blacktop highway unrolled beneath him. Nothing. The constant shifting of light and shadow from the midmorning sun on objects on the ground could be misleading, particularly among the greens, grays, whites, and browns of the natural camouflage along the rock-studded bank.

Must have been his imagination. Spotting anything that small from six hundred feet was a bit like looking through the wrong end of a telescope. Coming up on his original heading, he began to roll out of his turn—

There it was.

He eased off the throttle and nosed down, circling twice with flaps lowered to cut his speed before leveling off just above

the treetops and taking a good look.

Not his imagination. Once seen, the image of loose, awkward limbs peculiar to a lifeless body burned itself into the mind. And if he'd been wrong, the plane dragging by at treetop level would have brought any fisherman taking a nap alongside the creek to his feet.

He nudged the throttle forward, raised the flaps, and climbed to six hundred again before pressing his mike button.

"Otto, this is Klauder."

"You're ten minutes late, Klauder." Otto's heavy voice was ominous. "And what did I teach you about radio procedure?"

"Stuff your radio procedure. Call the sheriff's office. There's a body about a hundred yards south of the bridge on 115. It's on the east bank of the creek on the other side of the trees lining the dirt road. I'll circle to give the car a fix on the position."

Otto's voice was suspicious. "A body? You sure?"

"Make the damned call, Otto. I don't want to sit up here all day."

"Okay. Now keep your altitude, Klauder. That plane cost me a lot of money."

Klauder grinned. You'd think Otto was more concerned

about the plane than a student pilot with less than twenty hours' flying time. "Relax, Otto. I wouldn't think of going below six hundred."

Ten minutes later, a black and white sped across the bridge, turned, and plumed summer dust from the dirt road before skidding to a stop. Two deputies stepped out and looked up. Klauder banked sharply and streaked across while lined up on the car and the body to give them a direction. By the time he was half-way around again, they were there. One waved.

He set course for the airfield again, maintaining the specified six hundred feet. Not likely that anyone would report him to the FAA for flying below the minimum; if they did, he had a good excuse. But a man who'd just learned to fly had none at all for ignoring established landing pattern regulations.

**H**e nestled the small gouge into the felt-lined box, leaned back, and stretched. The carving of the mallard—head up, wings spread, feet braced for landing—needed only a few finishing touches, but there was no sense in risking a mistake when he was tired. Haller wouldn't care. "Take your time,

Klauder. Within reason, of course. Must keep their appetites whetted, but the less of your work out there, the higher the price, and the higher the price, the higher my commission."

Most of the day was gone. The sparkle of the sun on the lake outside his workshop window and the shadowed trees on the far shore were as good as a sundial. Close to six. He thrust back his stool. Usually he disconnected the phone while working. He hadn't done so today, expecting Meg Boniface to call about the body. If he hadn't spotted it, no telling when it would have been found.

Maybe the sheriff didn't need him this time. She'd wangled his appointment as consultant on the basis of his experience as a detective before he retired early from the Philadelphia police department—very early—but most of what she ran into gave her no trouble at all. The body might fit that category.

Still, she could have called. After all, he'd found it.

Stomach turning over at the thought of another microwaved frozen dinner, he decided to eat a real meal at Trevane's Bar and Grille in town and stop by the sheriff's office to see what was going on.

\*

Sheriff Meg Boniface—color pasty, her neat, bobbed iron gray hair seeming duller, the lines in the strong, close-to-sixty face deeper, the precisely creased tan uniform looser—looked tired.

"You've been flying now, what, two weeks?"

"Three," he said. She knew damned well how long he'd been flying because Otto told her everything that went on at the airfield. No innocent looking planes flown by innocent looking people would drop off innocent little packages containing white power within her jurisdiction.

"Pretty good job, then, spotting the body. 'Course, you could've killed yourself flying around at fifty feet."

"Not fifty. Some of those trees are taller than that. Get to the point. Who was he?"

"She. Twenty-year-old, name of Delia Cofer. You'd think that from fifty feet a real detective could tell it was a female—"

"More like a hundred, and at eighty miles an hour. She also had short hair and was wearing a T-shirt and jeans. Easier to determine the sex of a turtle. Why was she dead?"

"I'm waiting for Doc Melville to call, but I've seen it before. Face bruised and trauma from a sharp object on the back of the head, as though she was being

beaten and was knocked into something. Nothing at the scene to fit that head injury, though, not even a sharp rock. Nothing else out there either, that we could find. I think she was dropped there after she was dead. What's the first thought that pops into your mind?"

"If she was married, find the husband."

She nodded. "They call him Smiley. They lived in a trailer park down the road on 115, you know the one. The neighbors say that if he was beating her up, it wasn't the first time. He's a zilcher."

"Zilcher?"

"One of those people who contribute nothing to the world from cradle to grave. She worked as a waitress. He worked in a construction crew. Not often, and not very hard, evidently. Last hired, first fired. That didn't keep him from getting drunk three or four times a week." She jerked a thumb over her shoulder. "In a cell. He claims he was drinking with some buddies and she wasn't there when he got home. If we can't break that so-called alibi, the law says we let him go."

"How much time do you have?"

"Tomorrow morning." The words seemed to hurt. Wife

beaters ranked a half-notch above child abusers, who were seven grades below the white, slimy things found under rocks.

The phone interrupted her. Melville, the part-time M.E. who was also one of the few general practitioners in the county. Klauder held up a hand to tell her not to hang up and, when she handed him the phone, asked if there were any bruises below the neck.

"No," said Melville. "What are you looking for, Klauder?"

"There isn't a great deal of room inside a mobile home."

Melville thought it over. "Ah. If she was beaten in the home, she'd have bounced off furniture. Good thought. I understand Meg has a state police forensic crew out there. If they find no sign—"

"Bundle up her clothes. The crew can take them back to the lab along with environmental samples from the trailer and the site where she was found for comparison. What's left may tell us where she was killed. What does the lividity show?"

"It's consistent with how she was found, so she was moved quickly and not very far after she died. I can't rule out the trailer park. It's close enough."

Meg glared at him as he hung up. "I don't recall asking for help."

"You don't deserve any. All I've gotten from you for six months is hello and goodbye. Mad at me?"

She swiveled her chair to look out the window. "C'mon, Klauder. You know we haven't had anything major, and you've been too busy even to stop by and see how Andrea and the baby are doing—"

Ah. Andrea was the young mother whose husband had disappeared with all their assets, leaving her with the baby. Caught up in social services snarls, she held up a few supermarkets for food money. Meg had foisted her off on him as part-time housekeeper and cook until she could bludgeon a judge into giving her probation. Andrea was now an executive secretary at an electronics plant fifty miles away, but Meg had hinted she'd prefer to see her and the infant a permanent addition to the cabin.

"I can understand that. When you came here, you were a lost soul moping around out there. Wife dead, resigning over that fuss in Philadelphia and all. Needing a good detective wasn't the only reason I made you a consultant, you know. I gave you something to do. You no longer need that. You're a successful man—"

His jaw muscles tightened for a moment before he chuck-



led. She had a point. He could have stopped by more often.

"Thank you for the therapy and revealing your jealousy of my new-found wealth." He folded his arms and looked down at her. "But now that you've destroyed my self-esteem again and your chief suspect is already in a cell, you should be sitting there smug and smiling. You're not. Why?"

She slowly spun a pencil on her desk with a forefinger.

"I told you. With no solid evidence by morning, we can't hold him, and so far the three men I have on it have turned up nothing but a friend who followed him home and saw him stumble into the place."

"So it will take another day or two. I still don't see the problem."

She dropped the pencil into the beer mug on her desk and leaned back, suddenly all business. "The problem is that Smiley has two reasons to run the minute he's cut loose. The first is me. The second is Jarvis Hobart and his son. They have a farm about twenty miles out. If the victim hadn't been born Delia Hobart, you'd never have heard of them. As long as the law takes care of Smiley—whom neither one of them have ever liked, the kids ran off to get married—they'll stay out of it. But if the law doesn't—well,

they're the original eye-for-an-eye types. Ain't no worthless, drunken bum going to kill one of their womenfolk and get away with it. They'll visit the wrath of the Lord upon him themselves, no matter what it costs them."

"I didn't think there were any like that left around here."

She snorted. "You just don't recognize them because they use tractors instead of oxen to pull their plows, and wear T-shirts and jeans instead of overalls."

"So when Cofer is released, you're concerned he'll be shot."

"Too merciful. More like tying each hand and foot to a horse and sending them off in different directions." She leaned forward. "Cofer knows the Hobarts don't subscribe to innocent-until-proven-guilty so he's scared, and I can't spare anyone twenty-four hours a day to keep the Hobarts off him or to keep him from running. Is the picture clearer now?"

"Only in the center. There are no trains and only one bus a day out of here. He has to walk, get a lift, or drive. You know what he'll do. What does he drive?"

"He has a choice. His wife's car or his pickup."

"Impound his wife's car. Have one of the men swing by every hour or so. If the pickup

disappears, he won't have much of a head start, and an APB will turn him up."

Her nostrils flared. "Only a rich damned woodcarver would make it sound so simple. Get out, Klauder."

The words were the same, but the snap and crackle were gone. There was definitely more on her mind than Smiley Cofer.

"Fine. But while you're being so testy, do what I suggested with her clothes. And give a little thought to why her body was left in the open for a sharp-eyed pilot to spot, when it could have been covered with leaves and brush."

"He was too drunk to think."

"Maybe, but killing his wife sobers a man up fast, especially when he knows he's the number one candidate for a cell. But as you say, you don't need me. If you do, you know where to find me. Except in the morning. I fly in the morning."

He took three steps before she said, "Just as a matter of curiosity, why did you take up flying? Making so much money from your carvings that you don't know what to do with it?"

The motivating factor had been the desire to climb, dive, and soar; born from watching the birds at the lake. Rationalization had come later.

"Driving to Baltimore to deliver carvings, talking business with Haller, and driving home again takes twelve hours. Flying makes it six or seven."

She dismissed him with a flip of the hand.

He paused at Novachek's desk. The unofficial office manager, the chief deputy spent a lot of time inside. If anyone should know, he should.

"Meg doesn't look well, Novachek. What's wrong?"

"Whatever it is, she says not to worry about it. Melville has it under control."

"I sure as hell hope so."

"We all do, Klauder, we all do."

**A**mong the requirements for his pilot's certificate were at least three hours of cross country dual instruction. No better way to make the flight serve more than one purpose—and experience landing at a busy, controlled airfield—than to fly to Baltimore. Three days later, he packed the carving in Styrofoam pellets, and he and Otto took off, had lunch with Haller at a restaurant on the revitalized Baltimore waterfront, and were back in time for dinner at Trevane's.

Harry Persky, editor and publisher of the newspaper, slid into the chair opposite.

"How's his pilot's license coming along, Otto?"

Big, crewcut, and looking more like a Marine than a former jet jockey, Otto grimaced. "The government says he's halfway through. I say he's a light year away, but I'll whip him into shape."

"Let me know when you do, and I'll run an item. You can always use a little publicity. Flying service run by decorated former Air Force pilot, that sort of thing. Heard the latest on Smiley Cofer? He's gone, along with his pickup. Says a lot about guilt and innocence, doesn't it? I doubt if Novachek will ever find him. Too bad Meg is in the hospital—"

Klauder's cup stopped halfway to his lips.

"What for?"

"According to Melville, she almost stretched her luck too far. He told her last week that she had to have a bypass, but the Cofer woman was killed and she put it off. Caught up to her yesterday. Melville said it was touch and go all the way to the hospital in Harrisburg. Ended up as a triple bypass. She's in intensive care, but Melville says she'd doing fine . . . Klauder? . . . Klauder?"

"How the hell were we to know?" demanded Novachek. "She *hid* it, dammit! Always

with an excuse for being so pasty looking and out of breath. Anyone else would have been in a *wheelchair*! Never told us a thing, and neither did Melville. We're cops, not diagnosticians. She collapsed yesterday while she was giving us a hard time because Cofer disappeared. Scared the hell out of me. She wanted me to call you to help find him, but I drove escort for the ambulance and didn't get back until late. I've been trying to get you all day. Anyway, no visitors until day after tomorrow, so stop yelling at me like it's my fault and let's find him. You know how she is. Cofer back in a cell would be better medicine than anything the doctors can prescribe."

No one's fault, except hers, then. We're all responsible for ourselves, even the stubborn ones. Klauder shook his head.

"So what did Melville say?"

"That she'd be back bugging us before we knew it and to get on with it. She'll be fine. Are you going to help or not?"

Klauder grinned in relief. "Taking lessons? You sound just like her. But she knew he'd run. Weren't you keeping an eye on him?"

"Sure. We drove him home and told him to stay there. Beasley would drive through the mobile home park every once in awhile. The pickup was

there at three, gone at four. He had an hour's start or less. We sent out an APB. If he stayed on one of the main highways, he should've been picked up. Even if he used the secondary roads, he should've surfaced somewhere by now. All right, maybe he slipped through, but we figure he's holed up. The question is where. No friends or relatives around here to feed and hide him. He has to buy food and gas, and if he's dumb enough to use a credit card, we'll have him. He can't have too much cash. Only what was in his pocket and maybe his wife's purse."

"Meg was concerned about the Hobarts."

"No chance," said Novachek. "This morning we found a woman who saw him drive off alone."

"They might have been keeping an eye on him and waylaid him."

"Not their style. They just shoot you where you stand."

"Maybe, but Meg said they'd consider that too good for him."

He walked over to the large county map on the wall. "If he didn't get through the APB, he's within this area." He traced a circle with an index finger. "See if his buddies know—"

Something Novachek had said made him turn. "What did

you mean about the money? From his wife's purse?"

"If we'd found it empty, we'd know he had cash. We haven't found it at all."

"Her purse is missing?"

"From the beginning. The only thing we could figure was he might have thrown it in the woods to make us think she'd never come home."

Where a woman goes, so does her purse. If she'd entered her home, the purse would be inside.

"Where's the file?"

Seated at Meg's desk, he went through the reports and photographs. Outside the office, the business of the sheriff's department went on: people walking and talking, radio squawking.

Delia helped clean up at the restaurant where she worked after it closed at twelve, leaving shortly before one. If she'd gone straight home, she'd have been there before Cofer. He said she wasn't, that he'd staggered into bed and gone to sleep. The friend who had followed—Adam Holland, otherwise known as Dutch—said she couldn't have been there because he hadn't seen her car.

No surprises in the autopsy. Whatever had killed her had left no trace in the wound. Time of death between one thirty and two thirty. Nothing to indicate she'd fought back.



The object her head had struck had been smooth and round. No trace of blood, hair, or tissue on anything in the home, or her car.

Particles and stains on her jeans but not on the T-shirt. Her body had been dragged across the ground for a short distance, the upper body supported. *Where* was impossible to determine. The ground-in dirt was common to the area, even the trailer park.

Nothing from the other residents of the park. Nothing from where her body had been found.

He closed the file and looked up as Novachek entered.

"How did Meg read this?"

"She thinks there was an argument when Delia got home. She grabbed her purse, walked out, Cofer followed, hit her, and decided to get the body out of there."

"Taking the purse with him and throwing it away to make it look as she hadn't been home?"

"Something like that."

"He is sober enough and smart enough to work that out but leaves her car there?"

Novachek shrugged. "Hey, nobody said the guy was a genius."

"Something about that purse and car bothers me. Incidentally, anyone check the weather that night?"

Novachek grinned. "You think Meg would overlook that? Bit of a moon, a few clouds, plenty of starlight. Carrying her from the road to where she was found would have been no trouble."

"And also no trouble to drop her under the trees and cover the body instead of leaving it in the open."

"Yeah, Meg said you were worried about that. I can't see it makes much difference."

"What about this Dutch Holland?"

"Straight as a string."

"We all sag a little somewhere. Let's talk to the man again."

Adam Holland—called Dutch—was a handsome six feet of muscle topped by crewcut blond hair. The only reason he'd been out that night was his wife was a hundred miles away caring for an ailing widowed mother.

As Novachek had said, he was the yes sir, no sir type. What Novachek hadn't said was he was also the type who considers himself irresistible to women.

When he saw that, Klauder hoped for an indication that Holland was there when Delia arrived and that he'd propositioned her, been refused, hit her in anger, and carted away

the body so that Cofer would be blamed.

That might be exactly what happened, but they'd never prove it, not without stumbling over more than they had.

Klauder cursed. Cofer remained number one.

He allowed a few days for recovery before he drove in to see Meg.

Half propped in bed, color back to normal, she looked ready to walk out, dragging the IV attached to one arm.

She looked at him standing with fists on hips at the foot of the bed, and said, "Don't say a word, Klauder. I'm a sick woman."

"If I'd been Melville, I'd have knocked you out with a shot and hauled you to a hospital."

"If you're so damned smart, why haven't you found Cofer yet? Too busy flying around enjoying yourself?"

"He'll turn up." He grinned at her. "I'm not enjoying myself, I'm practicing. As soon as Melville says it's all right, I'm taking you up. Good therapy, up there soaring like a bird, your troubles behind you on the ground."

"Good therapy? For an old lady with blowout patches on her heart? Are you crazy? Go find Cofer, Klauder."

\*

Six weeks later, Cofer was still missing and she was back at her desk, irritable and shuffling papers. As long as Cofer was gone, there'd be no full recovery.

"Therapy time," said Klauder. "Let's go flying."

She glared at him and threw up her hands. "Why not? We'll probably crash. I'd enjoy that."

From four thousand feet, the green mountains were pretty, seeming to roll gently to the horizon. Until you took a close look and saw the steep sides and gashes and very few clearings and thought of a forced landing.

She'd flown before, of course, but never like this, at slow cruise in a wide circle around the county, going nowhere. He kept his turns shallow, his other movements easy, not wanting to do anything that might cause that repaired heart to race. Her initial nervousness had passed. She was enjoying herself, face almost pressed to the window, turning to grin at him occasionally. Over the lake and his cabin, the town, the roads and highways she'd been traveling her entire life, spread before her like a tabletop setting.

A queen surveying her domain, he thought.

She pointed to one side. "Hobart farm."

A blacktop bisected the valley and the farm, the fields on both sides green with corn ready to be picked. The white house was slightly off the road, the barn and a couple of other outbuildings behind it, the black of the highway stained with mud where farm machinery had crossed.

Expecting ramshackle buildings and scraggly fields, the obviously prosperous farm surprised him. Delia Cofer had married beneath herself.

"Strange," said Meg.

"I don't see anything strange, but then I'm not a farmer."

"Before I was hauled off to the hospital that morning, I ran into Dickson in the coffee shop. Remember him?"

"The deputy who decided he'd rather be a truck driver."

"Right. His truck was outside, loaded with cinderblocks. I hadn't heard of anyone building a home, so I asked where he was going. Hobart's farm, he said. They wanted to build a retaining wall of some sort. Do you see a cinderblock wall anywhere down there?"

"No, but let's take a good look."

He banked gently, letting down in several clearing turns before leveling off between the

hills at a thousand feet above the valley floor.

He flew up the valley on one side of the road, turned and came back.

"Could have been built inside," he said. "Like in the barn."

"I suppose. Let's continue the tour."

The afternoon sun behind him, he banked east and started to climb, the mountain-side rushing to meet him. As the crest rolled by several hundred feet below, something flashed below his left wing; a jarring note in the unbroken green of the trees. What the hell was this? *Déjà vu*?

He leveled off and did a one-eighty back over the valley. A break in the solid mass of green corn became a pair of ruts winding up the mountain, appearing and disappearing among the trees. He turned to fly parallel.

"On your side," he told Meg. "See the ruts? Follow them to the top."

Highlighted by the afternoon sun behind them, whiteness gleamed through low hanging branches.

"There are your cinderblocks," he said.

She pressed against the window to peer downward. "That's no retaining wall. Looks like a small hut. Why in the world

would they build it up here? Down close to the field it might make sense as a storage building.”

Her head swiveled as they passed over, her eyes narrowed, her brain obviously in high gear. He knew what the frown indicated. Even if someone as above reproach as the Episcopalian minister said he was going to do something and did something else, she wouldn't be content until she knew why.

He took note of the dirt road running along about halfway up on the other side of the mountain. He and Novachek had better sneak across the top and take a look before *she* decided to go climbing around.

**T**hey parked off the road and fought their way up through the thick underbrush under trees, avoiding patches of laurel and trampling ferns underfoot, Novachek muttering he felt like a damned pioneer since nothing had changed here since the Indians had roamed the area and he hoped they didn't run into a damned rattler.

The sun wasn't far from setting when they topped the crest and worked their way down to the little building hidden under the trees.

Scarcely more than head high and about eight feet

square, it had a solid wood door on the downhill side held closed by a two-by-four bar. Big blobs of mortar squeezed out between crookedly set blocks had hardened that way, other blobs littering the ground at the base—signs it had been built in a hurry.

“Hey!” Novachek pointed. Under the trees to one side was a battered pickup that looked as though it had been parked there for a long time.

Klauder pulled the bar loose and swung the door wide.

Novachek gagged. “Arghh! What a smell! What in the hell do they keep in there?”

Klauder stepped inside carefully. The rays from the low hanging setting sun spotlighted the interior and reflected in the wide, frightened eyes of the longhaired, bearded, unwashed, filthy, and half-starved figure staring up at him.

“Smiley Cofer,” he said.

Since he'd expected to find nothing, it was a damned good thing that Meg was probably the only law officer in America who could browbeat a judge into predating a search warrant.

A call from Haller took him to Baltimore the next morning; evening again by the time he walked into her office.



"What did the Hobarts have to say?"

She arranged the papers on her desk neatly. She'd been doing a lot of that lately.

"With Delia married to him, they knew something we didn't. Where he'd run to. They disapproved of him and didn't like him, but that didn't mean the Cofers didn't have dinner at the farm often. Family is family. One day he'd mentioned an abandoned cabin he'd come across in the woods. Great fishing camp. When he disappeared, they went there, scooped him up, and kept him in the barn until they built their own private jail. I told you they considered shooting too good for him."

"How long did they intend to keep him?"

"Who knows? Fed him just enough to keep him alive. He'd have never made it through the winter, so they're lucky they're not facing murder, along with so many other charges the paper could cover the road out to the farm. They're out on bail, of course. They're not the type to skip, and there's stock out there has to be taken care of."

"And Cofer?"

"Still says he didn't do it."

"If he didn't, we have no one but Holland. Possible. Nothing worse than a randy drunk who's been turned down."

"I'm beginning to believe Smiley. Even a zilcher is capable of honest emotion. He really loved Delia, and being locked up like that gives a man plenty of time to dwell on his sins. Got to give the Hobarts that. Right now he's carrying a load of guilt heavy enough to sink a battleship. You see, they convinced him that it didn't matter who killed her. He was still guilty. If he hadn't been drunk, she'd still be alive. A man's first obligation is to his family, not to pouring cheap whisky down his gullet."

"They have a point."

"He swears he'll never touch alcohol again. When he leaves the hospital tomorrow, he's going to join them at the farm and work hard to prove they wouldn't have made a mistake in giving Delia her inheritance—"

"Giving Delia her inheritance?"

"Old custom with some families around here. When each of the children turns twenty-one, they get a slice of the farm. Allows them to be independent without breaking up the family. Or the farm."

Klauder took a deep breath. "Can they sell it?"

"I suppose they could, but that's never done."

"Could be because there's never been a Smiley Cofer," he

said softly. "Do you think that, before he reformed, he'd hang on to a nice slice of prime farmland that had dropped into his wife's lap, or go for the money?"

"The land would be hers—" Her voice trailed off. "You may have something, Klauder."

He shrugged. "As good as anything we've come up with so far."

In the morning, Ham Hobart, four years older than his sister, narrow of face and long dark hair parted on the side, sat across from Meg and the videocam peering at him over her shoulder.

He said of course his father had given him his portion of the farm on his twenty-first birthday. Why not? He'd earned it. Certainly not like his sister, but if his father wanted her to have her share, it was his farm, wasn't it? And what did that have to do with anything?

"Perhaps nothing," said Meg quietly, "but your father said he'd given you a portion of the south end of the farm on one side of the road and had planned to give Delia the south end on the other side. Now if her husband talked her into selling it, who knows what would happen? A housing development? One of those long, low factories they were building here and there? You know

how those things go. Once the ice is broken—"

"Delia wouldn't allow him to break up the farm."

Meg smiled. "Why not? She was brought up to believe the husband made the decisions in the family. Her responsibility was to him, not you. But you went to talk to her anyway, didn't you? You knew she worked late, and you went to the trailer. You got there just after she pulled up. And she said if her husband wanted to sell, it was their business, not yours. You lost your temper, hit her and she fell—"

"God will strike you down for believing I could kill my own sister."

"I'm not worried. I know Him as well as you do, and we both know you didn't want it to happen. I also know fear of the law didn't make you do what you did afterward. You were brought up differently. You were thinking of your father, of what it would do to him to find out what you'd done. Better if he believed her husband was guilty, but you couldn't leave her there. It would be too clear that he was innocent, so to confuse everyone, you took her body—couldn't bear to conceal it, could you? Pile leaves and brush on the little sister you'd grown up with—"

Klauder saw the tears well into Ham's eyes. Meg didn't need him. She'd climbed inside the man, turned him inside out, and knew more about him than he knew himself. He left for coffee at Trevane's.

Never ceased to amaze him, that woman. The killing of Delia Cofer had cost her two months of worry and intensive effort. And almost her life. He'd expected her to rake Ham up one side and down the other. Instead, her voice was soft, as though she was a mother speaking to an erring child.

He gave her an hour.

"All settled?"

"All settled. He even told us where to find the purse. He couldn't bring himself to throw it away."

"Well, the old man still has his son-in-law, who will sell the farm the day the old man dies. A man like Smiley can't reform

that much. A zilcher is a zilcher, right?" He lifted a hand. "See you later."

The needling light was back in her eyes, a half smile on her lips.

"Conference with your banker?"

Aha. Feeling well enough to throw darts again.

"I count my money only on Saturday. I'm going to log a little time in the Cessna."

"I think I could use a little therapy. Fly like a bird, leave my cares behind on the ground. Care for a passenger?"

"You're always welcome."

"One condition."

"You're cadging a free sight-seeing flight and you're making conditions?"

"Only *one*. Stop handling those controls as if you had a fragile old lady aboard."

Melville could chalk up a full recovery.

FICTION

# Hibelia and the Fish

by Dan Crawford

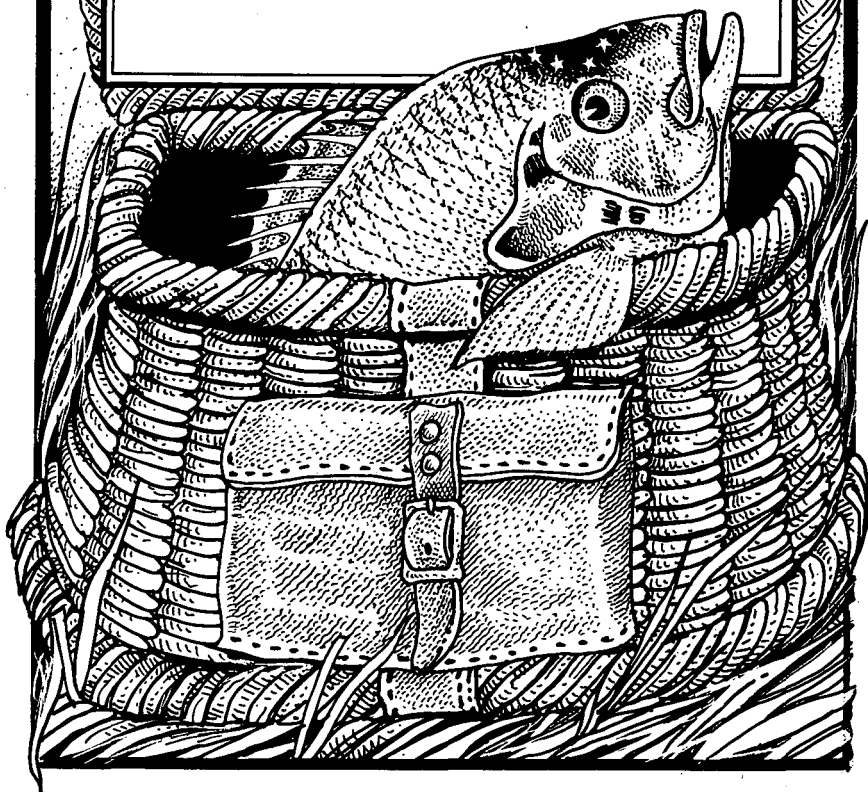


Illustration by Glenn Wolff

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

---

---

**T**he king never visited his hunting lodge in Lobiskis. Lobiskis lay away to the north, and he preferred the lodges he had in the more summery lands down south. Six or eight servants still lived in the hunting lodge year round, though, to keep things clean and in good shape in case the king changed his mind. The sheriff of Lobiskis had orders to make sure these servants had all the food and firewood they needed.

This sheriff, Baron Loram, lived in a castle several miles from the royal hunting lodge, out of the woods and over the river, with his family. He had one daughter, Hibelia, whose mother had died shortly after she was born. Hibelia was already growing up into a lovely, slender young woman when her father married a widow with two daughters and brought them back to live in his castle.

Hibelia got along fairly well with her stepmother, and she loved her stepsisters dearly, though she had to admit they did scare the fish. Hibelia loved to go fishing, as did Baron Loram when he had the time. But Lorasinth and Illislee were only seven and six years old, and hadn't learned that you had to be quiet while you were fishing. They laughed and sang and talked while they fished, which was no way to get any serious fishing done.

So what Hibelia finally decided to do was get up very early every morning and load her poles, her waders, and her box of baits and lures into a boat. She would row this boat out to a little island in the North Lobiskis River and fish all morning out there. When she got back to the castle, the rest of the family was usually just waking up. If Lorasinth and Illislee wanted to go fishing then, Hibelia was glad to take them because she'd already done all of her serious fishing.

One morning Hibelia reeled in a great big pumpkin-colored fish with a ring of silver stars between its eyes. "Oh, you're a beauty!" she said as she dropped it into her creel. "I'll have to have you mounted and hang you on the wall."

"Hibelia," said the fish, "why not just throw me back into the river instead?"

The young woman was astonished. "Throw you back?" she demanded. "Throw you back! Why, I . . ." She stopped and thought about this for a moment. "How did you know my name?" she asked.

Then she shouted, "Say! You're talking!"

"Why should I?" demanded the fish. "You already know I'm talking."

This was true, so Hibelia went back to what had surprised her



to begin with. "Give me one good reason I should throw you back," she said.

"Well, I am a magic fish," said the fish, poking its head up out of the creel. "I'm talking, for one thing, if you really have to have me say it. Anyhow, I'm your fishy godmother."

"I beg your pardon?" said Hibelia, picking up the fish.

"Oh, I am so sorry," the fish replied. "I don't speak very clearly when I've had a hook in my lips. I'll say it more slowly: I . . . am . . . your . . . fishy . . . godmother."

"Are you sure you have that quite right?" asked Hibelia.

"Are you going to throw me back before I get a severe sunburn?" the fish demanded.

It was not the sort of thing anyone who really fished cared to do, but Hibelia decided she really couldn't have someone that had talked to her stuffed and hung on the wall. So she bent down and set the fish into the sluggish current of the wide river.

"Thank you," said the fish, and disappeared beneath the water.

Hibelia watched to see if anything else was going to happen. When it didn't she shrugged and looked up toward the sun to find out whether she ought to be getting home yet or had time to fish some more.

As soon as she had turned her face away from the water, something came flying out. "Here," said the voice of the fish. "Take this, with my blessing."

A little bag had caught in the waist of her waders, the waist-high fishing boots and pants her father had had made specially for her. Hibelia opened the bag and found three shimmery blue fishhooks inside.

"They're magic, too," called the fish. "But they don't talk. You can use each one once, to catch anything you wish to catch."

"Aha!" said Hibelia. The magic fish might be a bit mouthy, but it knew how to give presents. "Thank you so much, er, fishy godmother."

There was no reply. Hibelia looked into the sky again and decided the sun was high enough to indicate it was time to go home. "At any rate," she said, "I've certainly caught plenty for today."

When she reached the castle, her stepsisters were waiting. As soon as Hibelia stepped inside, they ran to her.

"Did you catch any sharks, Hibelia?" asked Lorasinth.

"How about swordfish?" said Illislee, peeking into the creel. "I bet none of the knights ever had a swordfight with a fish."

"Look, Mama!" called Lorasinth as they went into the baroness's breakfast room. "Hibelia caught swordfish and helmetfish and lancefish to fight with."

"Can we go out fishing this afternoon?" shouted Illislee.

The baroness, who could not stand so much as to look at a wriggling fish, and did not feel fishing was any fit occupation for a baroness's daughter, shuddered and said, "Certainly not! Are you forgetting that we've been invited to Lady Illthea's tea this afternoon? And after that we're to accompany Lady Illthea's daughters to Fahaiada's ball."

"Ooooh, that's right!" said Illislee. "I'll wear the yellow dress and Lorasinth can wear the blue one."

"I wore the blue last time," Lorasinth replied, scowling at her sister.

"I know!" Illislee replied. "You wear blue at the tea party and I'll wear yellow. Then I'll wear the blue at the ball and you wear the yellow."

"Good!" said her sister, running out of the room. "The yellow one with the butterflies all over it!"

The baroness nodded approval after her daughters and then looked to her stepdaughter, saying, "Hibelia, I believe you'd do best with that white . . ."

She closed her eyes, and her mouth shrank into a little red dot. Then she said, "I do hope no one saw you in those . . . those garments."

Hibelia looked down at her waders and shrugged. "I was careful not to be seen. Another tea party, ma'am? All those little sandwiches and tiny cups of green tea?"

"Trust me," said the baroness, shaking a finger at her. "Someday you will have children of your own, and you will seize every chance you get to feed them at someone else's house."

"Oh, let them eat fish!" grumbled Hibelia.

She took her creel to the kitchen, where she gave the fish to the cooks, and then stalked up to her own room to get a little trunk and fill it with all the clothes for the evening's festivities. When she was only as old as Lorasinth, this meant a spare dress (usually blue, with white ruffles) and a matching reticule with white strings and lace. Now there had to be different jewelry for the ball than for the party, a fan, the powder for her hair, extra laces, three pairs of shoes (one for walking into the ballroom, one for dancing, and one for walking out in case it was raining when she walked out),

and all manner of fripperies. It was less trouble to pack a box of bait.

The tea party was long and tedious. Lorasinth and Illislee got to go off into a smaller room where the smaller girls sat around a table and fed sugar cubes to Lady Illthea's poodle. But Hibelia and the older girls had to stay in the parlor, sipping green tea and listening to all the latest news about every single one of Lady Illthea's relatives, each of whom had recently been very, very sick, or had at least caught fire.

At last everyone retired to a little dressing room to change out of their tea clothes and into ball clothes. A servant went along to help each of them, but Hibelia sent hers away. The trouble with Lady Illthea's servants was that they all knew just how Lady Illthea liked to dress, which was all right if you wanted to look like a middle-aged noblewoman with a bunch of sick relatives. Besides, they always pulled the laces too tight.

Naturally, it took Hibelia a little longer to dress. At length, the baroness came to check on her stepdaughter.

"Aren't you ready yet, Hibelia?" she called, bustling into the little room. "Everyone else is waiting on the front steps. You know how your father is when he has to wait. He's already started to tell those horse auction stories."

"Why don't you all go without me?" Hibelia replied, checking the mirror to see if her earrings were even. "No one will miss me at one little ball."

The baroness slid one earring down a bit. "Those are perfect with that necklace. You have always had excellent taste, my dear. Miss you? Of course they'd miss you! You're the baron's daughter, and a person of importance."

Hibelia sighed. She was always being told she was a person of importance. Persons of importance did not fish, climb trees, throw bags of water from high towers, or, indeed, have much fun at all. And they had to attend the most boring social functions.

"Anyway," her stepmother went on, untying Hibelia's laces to pull them tighter, "you know you always enjoy yourself once you get there."

This was true. Hibelia did like to dance, even if she did like other things more. "But these balls always last so long I can never get up early enough the next morning to go out and fish."

The baroness retied the laces. "It is certainly not the fault of Lady Fahaiada that fish cannot eat at sensible hours. And you are

much too old to be getting up early like any milkmaid. I wish you could remember that you are a person of importance. Do hold still now."

The baroness took Hibelia's ballgown off a chair and tossed it up into the air so it could settle down over her stepdaughter without disturbing Hibelia's powdered hair, earrings, ruffles, and so on. This was a very delicate job and not one to be entrusted to a servant.

"Lovely," said the baroness, hooking up the back as Hibelia put her arms into the sleeves. "You have your fan? *All* your shoes? And a handkerchief?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then do come along. If Lady Illthea yawns once more at one of those horse auction stories, she'll very likely throw her jaw out of joint. Honestly, that family is *so* fragile!"

It was a most beautiful ball. The food was good (Lady Fahaiada was proud of her cooks), and there were plenty of good dancers. When not dancing, Hibelia did not have to sit quietly with the hostess and discuss Cousin Oloa's kidney troubles. She was free to talk with her friends about other things. Not fishing, of course; all of her friends were also persons of importance and had given up fishing years ago.

But there was always news to be caught up on, both local news and news of the whole kingdom. And there were things one could more easily discuss without one's parents around: whose gown had cost what, whose governess most closely resembled the gargoyles on the new cathedral, and the progress of supposedly magic plants purchased from a sneaky-looking traveling merchant who had passed through Lobiskis.

"The mirror flowers should come up this summer," said Sadlund. She'd bought two dozen mirror flower seeds from the merchant, despite what her father had warned her about traveling salesmen. "He said it would be seven years, you know."

"Has it been seven years?" asked Hibelia. "Six, I thought."

"No, seven," said Sadlund. "Remember? It was the year of the terrible flood, when the water was right up over the bridge. You know, the year Prince Welamore left the country; he came through Lobiskis just after the seed merchant, remember?"

"Oh, remember the parades?" said Krisnete. "And Prince Welamore on that big white horse in front?"

"Oh, you're right," Hibelia said. "It was seven years."

"Did you hear he's coming back?" said Sadlund.

Krisnete dropped her fan and stepped backward.

"No! Really?"

Prince Welamore, the oldest son of the king, had spent the last seven years looking for ogres and dragons and buried treasure, as princes are at liberty to do until they must become kings. "Lady Illthea said it's because the king is not well," Sadlund told the others.

"It's probably all those blackbird pies he eats," said Hibelia. Loannis nodded.

"Do you think Prince Welamore will come back this way?" asked Krisnete, picking up her fan and waving it briskly at herself. "He went out of the country by way of Lobiskis."

"I don't see what difference it makes," said Sadlund. "After all that questing, he's probably coming home with some foreign princess he rescued from a beanstalk."

"From a beanstalk?" squealed Loannis.

"Well, you know what I mean," shouted Sadlund as everyone laughed.

"Quick, call the guard!" Krisnete hooted. "It's the big, bad beanstalk!"

"D-don't be silly!" chortled Hibelia. "Whoever heard beans talk?"

Sadlund was beginning to turn red, so it was probably just as well that Oregoff came over just then to ask her for the next dance. Soon they were all spinning across the floor again, and soon Sadlund was able to giggle when a dancer swirled past her and whispered, "Beanstalk's going to get you!"

So a good time was had by all, but as Hibelia had feared, she did not get home until well after midnight. By the time she woke up, it was much too late for any early morning fishing. And dark clouds had gathered, so there was no chance of going out later in the day with Lorasinth and Illislee. Thunderstorms were scrambling the sky by the afternoon.

The weather was still dark and cloudy the morning after that, so Hibelia stayed home again, in case it rained again. And it did rain, but not until nearly noon. "A waste of a whole morning's fishing!" Hibelia grumbled.

The baroness noticed that her stepdaughter had not been out to the river in two days. "I think she may be outgrowing this silly fishing business," she told Baron Loram.

"That's too bad," said her husband. "The way it's been raining



this spring, she can fish from the windows soon. The lowlands are starting to flood already."

"They'll be coming to the castle for shelter," said the baroness, hurrying out of the room. "I'll just tell the cook to make a lot of extra soup."

The storms got worse but had stopped again by morning. "You don't fool me twice," said Hibelia, putting on her oldest dress and her waders. "The fish will be wondering where I am."

Her boat was tied up at the dock as usual, but much higher, for the river was rising. The banks were high just here, so it had not slopped out onto the land yet. But the current was strong and swift. Hibelia had good, strong arms from rowing out to fish all those mornings, yet she still found it hard work to reach her usual spot on the island. When she got there, she was all but exhausted.

"Oh, of course," she panted when the first raindrop hit her just as she had the boat tied up. "That makes it all perfect, doesn't it?"

The rain was light at first but quickly became a full flashing thunderstorm. "Well, I can't row back until I've rested a little," said Hibelia, sitting down by the water. "I might as well fish a bit."

She caught nothing at all except raindrops, which soon had her dripping wet. Twice she had to set down her fishing rod to untie the boat, pull it farther up on the bank, and tie it down again.

"Don't you float away," she told the boat the second time. "I like this island, but I don't want to stay overnight."

She looked back toward home, but she couldn't see the dock at all, with the rain being whipped around by the wind. "I guess I could row to the other side," she said, peering through the dark weather. "The bridge should be safe, and I could walk back that way. But it's a tiresomely long way to hike."

Still holding the rope attached to her boat, she studied the bank on the wrong side of the river. It was closer than her side of the flood, and she could see not only the dark line of dirt, but a horseman riding along on top of it, way, way too close to the river. He was staring downstream, at the island, and couldn't see that the rushing water had cut the riverbank out from under him. His huge white horse was trotting on only a tiny shelf of earth.

"Go back!" shouted Hibelia. "Look out!"

Horse, man, and a lot of riverbank went tumbling into the swift water. The river was churning so much that the kicking of the horse hardly made any difference. Somewhere in the mud, a hoof-hold was found, and the animal heaved itself up onto land again.

But the man was no longer in the saddle. Hibelia peered out through the slashing rain. Was that a man floating there, or a log? It wasn't struggling, so it might be a log. But maybe the man had hit his head.

"I don't know if I can row out that far in all this," she said, pulling on the rope. "If the river's as fast as it looks, it could take me down to the bridge and smash me into the . . ."

Her hand hit the end of the rope. She stared out into the river, where her boat, having pulled loose of its knots, was spinning away, scattering the oars.

"Oh, you stupid . . ." she began, but stopped. She had to do something to help the horseman. If only she had brought something that would float, that she could throw to him. She looked around on the beach, but aside from a few tiny bits of driftwood, there was only her creel. And that was wickerwork; it wouldn't float for long in this.

Hibelia reached for her baitbox. Maybe that would float longer. As she picked it up, the lid bounced open. A small canvas bag plopped out onto the wet sand.

She slammed the box shut, but just as she was about to throw it, she paused to wonder what she had in that little bitty bag.

"Ohoho!" she cried. Her eyes grew round.

She tossed the baitbox down and snatched up her fishing rod instead. With her other hand, she grabbed the bag with the magic fishhooks her fishy godmother had given her.

"I wish I could catch that poor man that fell in," she shouted, just in case the thunder was too loud for the hook to hear her. She cast her line across the churning water.

Something struck her line. "This better not be a fish," she grumbled. She had cast at the big dark lump in the water, but that didn't seem to be where the line had gone. Nonetheless, she jerked the rod and felt the hook set in whatever it had caught.

Whatever it was jerked back. But Hibelia had been fishing for a while in her life, and she wasn't about to let it get away. She hauled and she pulled and she brought in the biggest thing she'd ever caught in all her days.

It was, indeed, a man. The hook had caught in his traveling cloak, but as soon as he had been dragged up onto the island, the line pulled free. That magic hook had disappeared.

Hibelia reached for the end of the line and put on the second hook. Spinning around, she whipped out her rod and let the second

magic hook fly across the water. "I wish I could catch my boat!" she shouted.

She had no sooner shouted that than something hit. Hibelia paused just long enough to wipe off her face. "I wish I'd brought stronger line," she said as the rod was nearly jerked out of her hands. Then she hauled back.

The boat was bigger than the man and took longer to land. But soon it was up on the shore of the little island. The second magic hook disappeared as Hibelia hauled the boat up to where she could tie it tight.

"Does a pair of oars count as one thing or two?" she wondered as she finished with the last knot.

She had knelt on the shore to tie up the boat, and while she was down there, she crawled over to check the man, who was lying still as dirt. "I used up a magic hook on you," she told him. "You'd better be alive."

He was very pale, and his head was bleeding a bit. He did seem to be breathing. Hibelia pulled at his traveling cloak to see if opening his collar would help.

"Ow!" She jerked her hand back from where the pin had scratched it. Then she stared.

Just at his throat, the man wore a golden pin in the shape of a mouse pulling a carriage. This scene from an ancient story was the symbol of the king's family.

"You're too young to be the king," said Hibelia, sitting back on her haunches. "I guess Prince Welamore decided to come home by way of Lobiskis after all."

Hibelia hadn't seen Prince Welamore in years, so she couldn't be sure this was the same man. But the gold pin showed he must be related to the king somehow. So it was doubly important that she get him somewhere that was warm, where he'd be taken care of. She looked to the near shore; the man's horse was walking back and forth, not sure what to do without the man in the saddle.

She looked back toward her own side of the river. The rain had not let up any. She couldn't make out even the tiniest sliver of the shore.

Then she looked down at the third magic fishhook. "Well," she said, "that's one way to do it."

First she hauled the man into the boat. Then she got in herself. Untying the rope at the beach end, she took a long, measuring look at it, and then tied the third hook to a loose strand on the end.

Saying, "I wish I could catch something solid on that riverbank," she threw out the line.

The rope pulled tight. Hibelia braced her feet and pulled back. "First time I've ever had to reel myself in," she muttered.

The swift river brought broken branches and big lumps of trash to crash into the boat. The rough, wet rope cut away at her hands. Rain was still coming down, slapping her in the face and filling her eyes so she couldn't see the riverbank.

She did know when she got there, though. The bump as the boat hit the dirt nearly threw Hibelia into the river. Still, she didn't let go of the rope; she had to find someplace to land where the boat would sit still long enough for her to get the prince and herself ashore.

This took some doing, especially after that third magic fishhook disappeared. But Hibelia did it and sat down in the mud, running her hands up and down her sore arms. "I never could have pulled all the way to my side of the river," she said.

It would have been nice to sit longer, but the rain was still coming down. "I could've stayed on the island if all we were going to do was sit and get wet," she told the prince.

The horse was interested but timid. "Here, boy," she called to it. "Come on, Lancebit, or whatever your name is. Good boy. Come on, show a little nerve, boy. Haven't you been out hunting dragons? Be brave."

Hibelia had dealt with horses before. Time and patience convinced the horse that she was a friend. Somehow, sore arms and all, she got the prince up on the horse and then climbed into the saddle herself. The rain continued to pour down on them and the prince, though still not awake, had started to grumble challenges to some dragon he was fighting in his dreams.

"So help me, if you pull a sword on me, you can just sleep in the wet," she told him.

Her teeth were chattering by the time she saw the long, low stone building covered with ivy. Her arms were so tired she could just barely reach up and bang the doorknocker.

A short, square woman and her short, square husband pulled the door open, obviously astonished to have visitors on such a terrible day.

"What's the to-do?" said the man. "What's it all about, eh?"

"It's some lassie, husband," said his wife.

Hibelia was not surprised they didn't recognize her. This was

her oldest dress, she was completely soaked with the rain, and she had always been very careful not to let anyone outside her family see her in her waders. It was the royal butler, of course, and the cook. She knew their names, she could think of their names in a second if only she weren't so tired. But there were other things to do first. "Please," she panted. "I . . . found a man . . . in the river. I think . . . it's Prince Welamore."

"Can it be, wife?" demanded the butler. "The prince in the river, eh?"

"Nonsense, husband," the cook replied, setting her fists on her hips. "It's just some fisher lassie whose cottage is full of water and wants a dry place to sleep. Run along to the baron's castle, lassie."

She turned as if to close the door, but her husband stopped her. "Who could make up a lie like that, wife?" he demanded. "Who'd think of such a thing, eh? We weren't sure the prince would come this way ourselves, just that he might, so I didn't tell a soul beyond Cousin Yelli, and she swore not to tell. So how could it happen, wife?"

Hibelia, meanwhile, was pulling the prince down from the horse and dragging him through the doorway. Once he was out of the wet, she could just sit and let them argue. She was so tired.

"Look, husband, there is a man!" said the cook. "Sorry, lassie, to call you a liar thataway."

"It's a man, wife," replied the butler. "But is it the prince, eh? That's the question, eh?"

"His pin," said Hibelia, pulling back his traveling cloak.

The servants knelt by the man. "Aye, that's a good sign," said the butler. "And he does have a look of the prince. But who could tell, eh, after all these years?"

"Best we get him up to one of the bedrooms," said the cook, "and have that lump on his head looked at."

The butler picked up the prince but asked, "And what about the fisher lassie, eh? She went to some trouble, aye, to bring a man out of the river. She might well have gone in, too, eh?"

"Well," said the cook, "I'll get her some dry clothes and let her have a nap in the kitchen. Time enough to reward her later, when we find out who this is she's brought us."

"In the kitchen, wife?" asked the butler.

"It's warm enough, husband," she replied. "And you know she most likely lives in some tiny cottage down in the lowlands. She'd feel lost in a big place like this, now."

So it was that Hibelia found herself sitting in the cinders down in the kitchen of the royal hunting lodge. She wore one of the cook's old dresses, which was warm but much too short and much too wide. Not wishing to embarrass the woman, Hibelia decided she would pretend to sleep.

And she did doze off until the cook said, in what was no doubt supposed to be a quiet voice, "There! That's done!"

The cook hoisted up the kettle and strode out of the kitchen. Hibelia rose and stepped quickly to the back door. "I can send someone back later for my clothes," she said, pulling on a pair of the butler's boots sitting on the step outside.

Rain was still pelting from the dark sky, but Hibelia found her way to the bridge, high and strong in the thrashing river. She crossed it and hiked the rest of the way home. The wind was cold enough for her to wish she hadn't left the comfort of the fire, but she knew everyone would be worrying about her at home.

In fact, Baron Loram and his wife were waiting at the door. "Of course, you would have to go out fishing, even on a day like today," said her father.

"Is that your dress?" the baroness demanded. "It's torn; your knees are showing. And you're all over . . . is that mud?"

Now that she was home, Hibelia realized how tired she was. "Cinders prob . . . probably," she said, stumbling into the castle.

The baroness caught her and shouted at the servants, calling for hot soup, hot tea with lemon, and every extra quilt in the place. "To bed, child," she ordered, throwing her cloak around Hibelia's shoulders. "Bed, before you die of pneumonia!"

In mere minutes, Hibelia was tucked up in a nightgown and cap that had been heated by the fire. The bed was laden with a dozen quilts and a dozen pillows and a little stuffed rabbit Lorasinth had sneaked in while no one was looking. Warm and dry, and home at last, she pressed her nose up against that of the rabbit and closed her eyes.

Just as Hibelia was drifting off to sleep, Prince Welamore was fighting to wake up. He had realized the dragon was just a dream and dropped his dream sword. At length the face of the dragon, discouraged, disappeared and was replaced by the face of Higanberry, the butler at his father's hunting lodge.

The prince looked around. Hilita, Higanberry's wife, sat by the fireplace, keeping a kettle of soup warm on the hob. It was quite like old times, as if he'd never left.



He looked up at the butler again. "Remember when you were still only a footman, Higanberry, and I threw your hat in the river? I fell in, and you had to fish us both out."

"Air and magic!" cried Hilita. "It *is* the prince! When did you grow a beard, Your Highness?"

"Bring the soup, wife," answered her husband. "How did you fall in, eh, Your Highness? Do you remember?"

"Why, I reached for the hat . . ." The prince frowned. "Oh. You mean this time. I . . . all I remember is I thought I saw a mermaid or something on that little island; up the river, you remember? It might have been the rain. I wasn't watching the road, and it . . ."

He tried to sit up. "Lofoloa! My horse! I . . ."

"Lie down, eh, Your Highness," said the butler, holding the prince's shoulder. "She had a horse with her, didn't she, wife? Loslend will have taken it to the stables by now."

"Aye, that's right, Your Highness," said Hilita, bringing up a big bowl of soup. "It was walking well enough when she brought it to the door."

"She?" said the prince, trying to ignore the soup.

"That fisher lassie who brought you in, Your Highness," said the butler. "She could well have been your mermaid, eh? She'll be down in the kitchen yet."

"I'd like to speak with her; then," said the prince. "She might or might not have been the mermaid, but she must certainly have saved my life."

"You see to that, husband," said Hilita, pushing the butler back from the bed. "Now, Your Highness, can you eat any soup?"

Higanberry left the room and was back in moments, carrying dripping clothes. "She's gone and left her things behind," the butler announced, much surprised. "Maybe she was a mermaid, eh, if she didn't mind going out in the rain without them."

"Shame on you, husband!" cried Hilita, who had almost persuaded the prince to drink a spoonful of soup. "I gave her one of my dresses, to be sure. Take those things out of here before you're getting His Highness's bedding wet. Those fisherfolk don't mind the wet, living down by the river day in and day out."

The butler started to leave, but the prince commanded, "Wait! Come here!"

Higanberry brought the clothes over, being careful not to drip any rainwater on the bed, at least where his wife was likely to see it.

"What's this, now?" said the prince, taking hold of one foot of the waders. "This can't belong to any of the fisherfolk in the lowlands; waders like these are much too expensive. It must have been some visiting noblewoman."

"Why, Your Highness didn't see her," laughed Hilita. "A wet, bedraggled little thing with no more meat on her bones than . . ."

"Hush, wife," said the butler. "We know nothing about prices, Your Highness; all our food and clothing are sent to us. We . . ."

Another man stepped into the room. "Begging Your Highness's pardon," he said, "but the Great Coach is ready."

"The Great Coach?" demanded the prince.

"What can you be thinking of, Loslend?" demanded the cook. "His Highness is just now awake and hasn't even had any soup yet."

"There's room for soup in the carriage, eh?" answered Higanberry. "And it's all fixed up to give His Highness a good, gentle ride."

"A ride?" said the prince. "Wait a minute! A ride to where?"

The stablemaster bowed toward the bed and said, "We had orders from His Majesty, Your Highness's father. If Your Highness came this way, and needed any medical attention at all, we were to bring Your Highness at once to the royal palace, to be seen by the royal doctors."

"But you can let His Highness rest a bit first, can't you?" demanded the cook.

"There's nothing wrong with me anyway but a headache," Prince Welamore added, trying to sit up again.

But no one's objections were allowed to get in the way. The prince was bundled into the Great Coach and driven all the way south to the royal palace. Because he insisted, he was allowed to take the mysterious waders along with him.

Everyone at court was overjoyed to see Prince Welamore again. Ladies of a certain age were even happier to learn that the prince had come home not at all injured by all the ogres and dragons and things, and unmarried. All that was wrong with him, for all his adventuring, was a trifling lump on the head and some strange story about a mermaid or a woman he'd seen fishing. The story quickly went around that Prince Welamore wanted very much to find this woman, and the only clue he had was that she had worn a pair of waders made especially for her.

There was such a rush to try on those waders that the king had

to order the ladies to make appointments. They had a perfectly terrible time. Most of them couldn't squeeze their legs in at all, and those who did complained so much about how it hurt that everybody knew they were the wrong ones. Lady Jansie got stuck. The servants took an hour to pry her loose because the prince would not allow the waders to be cut or damaged in any way.

A messenger was sent to the baron of Lobiskis, to ask him if any noblewomen had visited his castle lately, and whether any of them had gone out fishing. But the baron was not at home when the messenger arrived. Dikes and dams in the lowlands had been broken by all the flooding, and Baron Loram had gone down personally to see that they were repaired before more damage was done.

The baroness received the messenger, but she had hardly any more time than the baron. People left homeless by the floods had hurried to the castle, and it took all her time to see that they had dry clothes and hot soup.

"Fishing?" she said. "Persons of importance don't go fishing! Of course no noblewoman around here would be seen fishing!"

If the messenger had told her why he was asking, or that it was Prince Welamore who wanted to know, she might have made some different answer. As it was, she was thinking, No one needs to know that my daughters have such disgusting habits.

The messenger didn't want to stay in Lobiskis long, what with all those people crowding into the castle, so he rode back to the king's court and reported what the baroness had told him.

By this time, Prince Welamore had spent a week in bed and was completely bored with that. So, ignoring the advice of all the doctors and the wishes of his parents, he got dressed and went out to fetch his horse.

"I'm not going out to fight dragons, after all," he said as his parents scolded him. "I just need a little fresh air. Maybe I'll ride out and do a little fishing."

He didn't say that he was going fishing in Lobiskis, but everyone could guess. The king ordered everyone else in the court to stay put. "He won't get any rest with half the ladies of the court, and all their escorts, riding after him," said His Majesty. "Just let him go."

So the prince rode out with all his fishing gear and a mysterious pair of waders. He was in no hurry, and didn't feel completely well yet, so it took him two days to reach the North Lobiskis River. He

didn't know quite where he had fallen in. The sun was shining now, and the raging water had gone down a bit.

"You'd remember, Lofoloea," he told his horse. "You were awake." But Lofoloea gave him no hints.

The prince rode north past the bridge and finally sighted the little island.

"It must have been somewhere around here," he said, unpacking his fishing rod and other supplies. "Let's give this a try. Maybe she'll come out and do some fishing, too."

It was a nice day for fishing, and if the prince had been paying attention, he would have been quite cheered by the number he caught. But he was watching for mermaids or fisher lassies, and completely ignored the fish he was pulling in until one of them called to him from his creel.

"Hey, prince! Over here! Here, prince, here! Here, boy!"

The prince yanked open the creel. A pumpkin-colored fish with a circle of stars between its eyes stared up at him. "Good prince!" it said. "Good boy!"

"Roses and moons!" exclaimed Prince Welamore. "Are you an enchanted fish?"

"Well, I'm no chicken of the sea," the fish replied. "Just throw me back, like a good prince, and I'll do you a favor."

The prince had heard about this sort of thing. "Of course," he said, and flipped the big fish back into the river.

"Good boy!" called the fish, once the rings from the splash had rolled away. "Now, here's the favor. You don't want all those other fish, really, so why not take them on up to the baron of Lobiskis? He's low on food because of all the homeless people he's had in the castle lately, and your father's been ignoring all these northern barons lately."

"Oh," said the prince. "That's it?"

The fish reared and snorted. "You don't want to help your father ensure the loyalty of the northern provinces?"

The prince hadn't had politics on his mind. "Well, yes," he said. "It's just that I thought you were going to help me find the lady who saved my life."

"You certainly expect a lot, for a prince who fishes with worms," said the fish. And, with a splash and a flip of her tail, she was gone.

Prince Welamore had never heard of a talking fish that was so concerned with politics, so he was naturally quite disappointed. But he knew his duty as a prince and carried his creel down to the

bridge and across the river. Once on the other side, he hiked to the castle of the baron.

Even though the prince had arrived unannounced, and without a parade of servants and sycophants, this was still a visit of state. So Prince Welamore was ushered into the state reception room, and the servants informed him they would hurry to fetch the baroness, as the baron was not at home.

When Prince Welamore had passed through Lobiskis on his way out of the country, the baron had not yet married his new baroness, so he wondered for a few minutes if this was the woman he was seeking. But as she strode into the state reception room, the prince could tell she was certainly not the sort of person who ever went fishing.

"What an honor, Your Highness!" said the baroness, making her lowest curtsy. "We were told you might pass through our territory, and were saddened to hear that you were already at court."

So the baroness had not heard that story, thought the prince. "I did, indeed, pass through Lobiskis, milady, but had no time to partake of your hospitality." He smiled. "Beyond a large drink of river water."

"How dreadful!" the baroness cried when he had told her about his fall into the river and how he had been rushed home. "I hope it has not given you a disliking for Lobiskis."

"Far from it," said the prince. "In fact, I came today to present you with a gift of fish, by way of thanking you. I know I have you and your husband to thank for the fact that the royal hunting lodge was so well taken care of, that I was able to rest there after my rescuer had pulled me from the flood."

"Oh," said the baroness with another curtsy, "That is no more than our duty. But who rescued Your Highness from the river?"

The prince had not told her that part of the story yet, thinking to use it as part of a question later. But as he opened his mouth to answer, she gasped, "Oh, but I mustn't keep Your Highness standing here. Would Your Highness care for some tea?"

His Highness did not particularly care for any tea. But as he was trying to think of a way to excuse himself, she went on, "And if Your Highness would not mind, I shall have my daughters join us. They are forever playing down by the river, and perhaps Your Highness's warning would impress them where that of a mere mother would not."

His hopes rose, and Prince Welamore followed the baroness into

the tea room, still carrying his creel full of fish, with the mysterious waders tucked up under his arm. But he could see, when Lorasinth and Illislee curtsied to him, that they were much too young to be the woman he had seen. The baroness apologized for her other daughter, who was still too ill to come downstairs. Prince Welamore assumed she meant another little girl.

But it would be impolite for him to leave suddenly now. So he sat down and drank tea with the baroness and her daughters, discussing the weather and the beauties of Lobiskis, and other such polite topics until he could get away. The little girls were also doing their very best to be polite, but this was the first prince they had ever seen. So even though they had been taught not to ask personal questions, they couldn't hold back forever.

"Sir," said Lorasinth, "I mean, Your Highness, where did you find Hibelia's waders?"

"We couldn't find them anywhere," added Illislee.

The baroness's mouth opened and closed soundlessly as the prince unfolded the fishing pants. "These belong to . . ." he began.

"Hibelia," answered Illislee.

"But when she's not wearing them, we use them for the dragon cave where the handsome prince rescues the princess," said Lorasinth. She giggled.

The prince nodded, looking from them to the baroness. "She wears them to go fishing?"

"What else?" said Lorasinth. Illislee jabbed her with an elbow. "I mean, yes, Your Highness."

"And does she ever go fishing on the island in the river?" asked the prince. "Not far from the hunting lodge?"

"Oh yes," said both girls together.

"But I can promise Your Highness," the baroness broke in, directing a quelling glance at her children, "that she won't do it any more."

"Oh, I hope she will," Prince Welamore replied, bestowing the waders on Lorasinth. "The fact is, I was thinking of getting a fishing party together. Let me know when she feels well enough to come fishing."

"Persons of importance . . ." The baroness remembered this was the prince, and went on, ". . . do like to fish, I hear."

"Yes, indeed." The prince set down his teacup, and rose. "I must go now, but I will visit your ladyship again, if I may."

"Oh," said the baroness. "Oh yes. Do come any time."



Prince Welamore went back to the hunting lodge and sent word to his father to say he'd found the woman who had saved his life. Of course, the king and his whole court set off to Lobiskis at once. A great celebration was held in Hibelia's honor, once she was over her cold. The king presented her with a jeweled tiara with the word *Heroine* spelled out in diamonds over a fish made of emeralds.

As soon as that was taken care of, the king went back south, where he could be warm. But the prince and many of his friends stayed on at the hunting lodge. There were frequent parties and balls, which Hibelia attended without complaining at all. Prince Welamore often left these affairs early, though, so as to get up early the next morning to go fish.

And what the prince did, everyone else wanted to do, to show they also were persons of importance. Fishing became very popular with the lords and ladies. Even the baroness of Lobiskis squeezed into a pair of waders and went down to the river. After she had fallen in twice and gotten water up her nose, though, she said, "Persons of importance may go fishing. But no law says they have to."

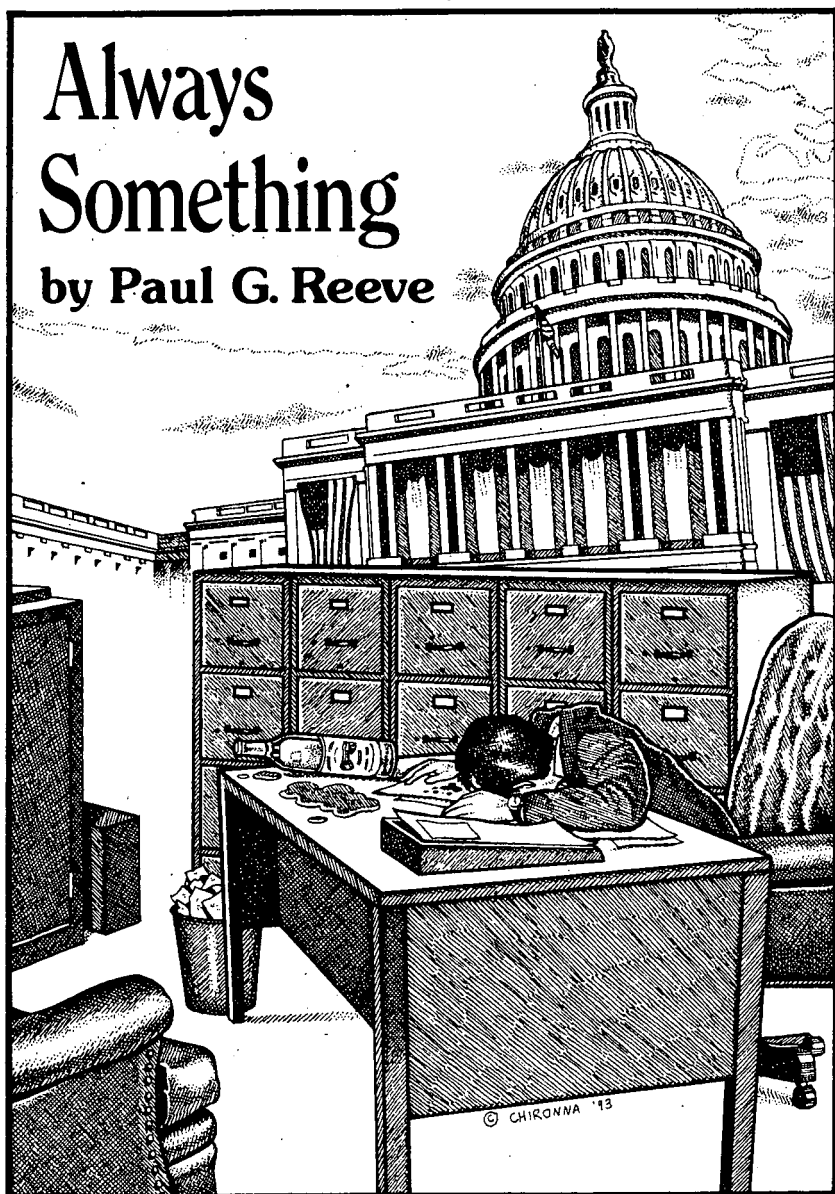
Everyone who did fish had orders from Prince Welamore (and, eventually, from Princess Hibelia as well) that anyone who caught a pumpkin-colored fish with a ring of silver stars between its eyes should throw that particular fish back into the water. But no one ever did catch the fishy godmother again, which led several people to believe she had the whole business planned from the very beginning.

*Important Notice to Subscribers: All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 5124, Harlan, Iowa 51593-5124. For change of address, please advise six to eight weeks before moving. Send us your current mailing label with new address. Call 800-333-3311 with questions about your subscription.*

FICTION

# Always Something

by Paul G. Reeve



---

---

**B**ack in the nineteenth century our political leaders would occasionally shoot one another in a duel. Think of Burr and Hamilton. And in the Congress it wasn't all that unusual for one honorable member to pull a knife on another or for the whole place to break out in a donnybrook. But nowadays we're more civilized. Sure, a bunch of Puerto Rican freedom fighters shot up the House of Representatives back in the Truman administration, and the decade of the sixties saw three major political assassinations, but all that was the work of the lunatic fringe. Official political mayhem has mostly been on a larger scale. Despite all the recent handwringing editorials about how Washington, D.C., is the nation's murder capital, the place doesn't seem to me, as a longtime resident, any worse than your average big city with your average assortment of gang members, drug addicts, and so forth, whose average lives are solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short—emphasis on short. If you are not one of their number and you stick around Capitol Hill, your odds of surviving are not much worse than they would be in any other town.

Even twenty-odd years ago, when it seemed that there were

always angry mobs of antiwar protesters camped out on the Mall, waving signs and smoking the lawn, seldom was anyone actually murdered. So it came as a shock on that May morning in 1970 when the Honorable Randall Rourke, Member of Congress, was found murdered right in the Capitol building itself. There was no doubt it was murder. He was shot right between the eyes, and no weapon was found. So it couldn't have been suicide.

He was found in his small office in the basement of the building. It was an office that he wouldn't ordinarily have been entitled to. Why he had it, no one knew for sure. He had been in Congress for about twenty years, but his service was not continuous. And because he had also changed committee assignments several times, he had never advanced to a chairmanship, even of a subcommittee. A hideaway office in the Capitol is usually a perk that comes with a leadership position.

News travels fast on Capitol Hill. In some ways it's like a small town—smaller in 1970 than now. So as soon as Rourke's death was discovered, the gossips were briskly spreading the story. Very little productive work was done that day. The disturbance was

worse, naturally, on the House side, where the Tuesday-to-Thursday Club, out of respect for the deceased, decided to adjourn, as they habitually do at the slightest provocation.

Since I worked on the Senate side, I didn't expect Rourke's death to have a direct effect on me or my boss, Senator Prentiss. I knew Rourke—but I hadn't seen him for awhile, and didn't care to. The senator, so far as I knew, didn't know him at all. The senator was newly elected, and I had been kicking around Capitol Hill for almost twenty years in various staff positions.

So I was surprised when I got to the office at the Russell Senate Office Building—called the Old S.O.B. in those days, Russell was still a senator—to find two of Washington's finest waiting to see me.

"Mr. Ward?" said the taller of the two, flashing his I.D. "We're investigating the murder of Congressman Rourke and would like to ask you a few questions."

"Sure. Step into my office," I said, leading them into the small cubicle I occupied between the reception area and the senator's office.

"Nice digs," the shorter detective said, looking at the battleship grey government-issue desk that filled less than three

quarters of the space, and the piles of correspondence, Congressional Records, Federal Registers, committee reports, and other debris of the legislative task that covered every flat surface except my swivel chair and what could be seen of the floor.

"Yeah. When it comes to office space a senator's administrative assistant rates right up there with the janitorial staff. Now what can I do for you? Don't the Capitol Police have jurisdiction in this case?"

"The Kampus Kops!" sneered the shorter detective, and somehow you could hear the *k*'s in his pronunciation. That was unfair, of course. The chief of the Capitol Police was a professional. He was, in fact, a deputy chief of the Metropolitan Police. But a lot of the uniformed officers of the Capitol Police were political appointees and varied widely in their qualifications.

"Shut up, Ralph. Actually, Mr. Ward, we are cooperating with the Capitol Police. We'd like to ask a few routine questions."

"Ask away."

"When did you last see Congressman Rourke?"

"I don't know. It must have been more than three years ago."

"Where?" The tall detective was looking at me closely. His short friend, thumbs hooked in his pockets, rocked on his heels and looked out the window into the courtyard.

Suddenly, I remembered the last time I saw Randy Rourke and understood the cops' interest.

"It was at a fundraiser at the Shoreham, a month or so before the '66 election."

"Do you remember anything else about that occasion?"

"I remember everything about that 'occasion,' as you call it. I doubt if Randy does—did. He was falling-down drunk."

"Is that so? We heard he had some help falling down," said Ralph.

"You mean that I threw a punch at him? Not so, although I know that story went around. Look, Randy's—was—a belligerent drunk. I said something that riled him. He took a swing at me, missed, and fell ass-over-teacup into the shrimp dip. Not very dignified for an Honorable Member. He or some of his friends, if he had any, passed around the story that I had knocked him down. As far as I'm concerned, that's all ancient history."

"Are you sure you haven't seen him more recently?"

"Yes."

"Have you talked to him?"

"No."

"Where were you between seven P.M. and midnight yesterday?"

"Various places. Here till about eight thirty. The Carroll Arms till about ten thirty. Home by midnight."

"Did you see anybody who would remember you?"

"Fred, the bartender at the Carroll Arms."

"Did you stop anywhere else?"

"No."

"Where do you live?"

"Twelfth Street, S.E., just off East Capitol."

"Why did it take you so long to get home?"

"I walked."

"It's not that far."

"I walked slow."

"Why didn't you keep your appointment with Congressman Rourke last night?"

"My what?"

If you hang around Washington long enough, anything can happen. You're bound to be suspected of something—malfeasance, misfeasance, nonfeasance, lying, cheating, even murder. There I was suspected of murder, the last thing I expected to be suspected of.

Of course, I hadn't had an appointment with Rourke, but I was the only one who knew

that, with the possible exception of Rourke himself, and he wasn't talking. His desk calendar, however, had my name penciled in for seven thirty. Since I had been alone in the office until eight thirty, I had no alibi.

But I also had no reason for wanting to kill Rourke, other than the general reason that several hundred other people had, namely that he was a swine. What I wanted to know was how did my name get on his calendar?

While I was mulling that over, the senator called me into his office. He always got to the office early and had apparently seen the cops before I came in.

"Ross," he said, "I value your opinion. What should I do when my senior staff aide is the prime suspect in a murder investigation?"

"Doesn't look good, does it?"

"Well, I wouldn't want to run for reelection hauling that baggage."

"Fortunately, you're not up for almost five years. I hope the matter will be resolved by then. Meanwhile, you might at least ask the aide in question if he did it."

"Well?"

"No. I can't claim credit for that particular service to the republic."

\*

The senator was less than thrilled with my cavalier attitude toward Rourke's departure from this vale of tears. We agreed that I would take a leave of absence, mostly so he could have something to say to the press to keep them quiet. I kind of resented that, but then the senator didn't have much of a stake in me. I wasn't a long-time political ally or even someone he knew very well. I had been taken on only a few months before to replace the senator's first administrative assistant, an old friend and finance chairman from the campaign who had helped the senator get elected but had his own business to attend to back home.

At least, I thought, being out of a job would leave me some free time to try to figure out how I got into this mess in the first place. But where to start? I decided to look in at the Carroll Arms to see when Fred was expected. He was the closest thing I had to an alibi.

The Carroll Arms was in the Capitol Hill Hotel directly across C Street from the Senate Office Buildings. The hotel and restaurant had gained some fleeting notoriety during the Bobby Baker scandal, and ironically, much later, after the hotel and restaurant were closed,



the building housed the Senate Ethics Committee. At this time, in 1970, the restaurant was flourishing, if not the hotel.

The restaurant's dim lights and red felt walls, Aggie the waitress, and the generosity of Fred the bartender's drinks all conspired to draw in the crowds from the Senate like flies to honey, or more aptly, like moths to the flame. There mingled the great, the not-so-great, their counselors, and hangers-on, and they were not always on their best behavior. I once suggested to Aggie that she could make a fortune if she were to write her memoirs. She said, "Honey, I could make more if I promised not to write 'em."

Since it was only about ten thirty in the morning, the restaurant was practically empty. No one was behind the bar. On the floor, Aggie was setting up for lunch.

When she spotted me, she called out, "Hey, Ross, you're here kinda early, aintcha?"

Gap-toothed, henna-haired, bawdy, Aggie always reminded me of Chaucer's Wife of Bath: "Bold was her face, and fair and red of hue."

"When does Fred come on?" I asked.

"Not until the cocktail hour, around five, but I can pour you

a drink right now if you want." She sashayed around the bar and ducked under the pass-through.

"Okay."

"So what do you want Fred for?" She poured a generous amount of scotch and set it on the bar.

"Could I have some ice in that?"

She scooped up a couple of ice cubes. "Does this have something to do with those two cops who were in here this morning?"

"They do get around, don't they? What did they say?"

"They asked for Fred's address. What's it all about?"

"Congressman Rourke was murdered." I sipped the scotch.

"That prick. I hope they find who done it and give him a medal. Hey, you didn't do it, didya?"

"The cops think I might have."

"And Prentiss fired you. That's why you're in here so early in the morning."

"Not exactly, but the senator couldn't stand the heat, so he got me out of the kitchen." I finished the scotch and walked back over to the Old S.O.B. From there I caught the subway in the basement to the Capitol building. The office where Rourke had been murdered was somewhere in the

rabbits' warren of the Capitol basement.

I found my way through the maze of the Capitol southward to the House side. I didn't really know what I was doing. My chances of finding the office were only a little better than those of finding a needle in a haystack, and if I did, what would I find? The place would surely be locked or crawling with police.

But no. One Capitol Police officer was stationed at the door. If he hadn't been, I never would have guessed that the anonymous office door was anything but the door to one of the uncounted storerooms, offices, broom closets, machine shops, nooks, and crannies that filled the basement of the Capitol.

I walked by as casually as I could, nodding genially at the officer. Rounding the first corner past the officer, I saw another door. It had to be either a closet or a side entrance to Rourke's office. I tried the knob. It turned. I opened the door. It was a shallow closet with shelves along the back stacked with rolls of blueprints. Storage space, no doubt, for the architect of the Capitol. I had started to close the door and go when I noticed a thin line of light on the floor at the back of the closet. Behind the shelves was another door.

I moved some of the rolls of blueprints out of the way, looking for the doorknob. The shelf fell with a clatter, scattering rolls of plans into the hallway. The officer came running around the corner.

"Hey," he shouted, "What's going on here?"

I felt like I had been caught with my hand in the cookie jar. "Um . . . nothing, officer," I muttered. "I was just looking for the plans for the renovation of the west front."

"Here, let me help you," he said.

"No, no, that's all right," I answered, a bit too eagerly. But he mumbled something and went back to his post.

I gathered up the blueprints and the shelf, tossed them into the closet, went in, and closed the door behind me. It was almost pitch black. The only light came from beneath the door to the hallway and the door to Rourke's office. After some fumbling around, I found the doorknob, tried it. Locked.

But I knew some of the old spring-loaded locks would respond to the credit card trick, so I gave it a try. It worked. I gave the door a push. It wouldn't budge. Great, I thought, the door's nailed shut, or there's some immovable piece of furniture in front of it.

# IF MURDER IS YOUR CUP OF TEA...

## YOURS FREE!

The New Bedside, Bathtub & Armchair Companion to Agatha Christie is yours to keep absolutely free simply for previewing **Murder on the Orient Express**.



...THE  
AGATHA CHRISTIE  
MYSTERY COLLECTION  
WILL STIR YOUR  
IMAGINATION

Your introductory book

## MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

Discover Agatha Christie's world of mystery, adventure and intrigue in one unique collection.

Agatha Christie's tales of mystery and suspense have become timeless classics - selling over 500 million copies worldwide. And now, for the first time ever, you can enjoy all of them in one unique hardback collection. THE AGATHA CHRISTIE MYSTERY COLLECTION—only from Bantam Doubleday Dell, one of the world's foremost publishers.

As a special preview to this unique collection, we're offering you the chance to preview **Murder on the Orient Express** risk-free for 15 days. What's more, simply for previewing it, we'll also send you **The New Bedside, Bathtub & Armchair Companion to Agatha Christie** (value \$12.95), to keep absolutely free with our compliments.

Like all the books in this unprecedented collection, **Murder on the Orient Express** is a handsome hardcover volume, Smythe sewn and printed on the highest quality

acid-free paper. Bound in Sussex-blue simulated leather with gold titling, it's sure to make an impressive addition to any home library.

You can examine it free for 15 days without risk or obligation. If you're not completely satisfied, just return it within that time and owe nothing. However, if you're like the millions of other readers who love Agatha Christie's thrilling tales of mystery and suspense, keep **Murder on the Orient Express** and pay only \$12.95 plus postage and handling (and sales tax in N.Y. and Canada).

You will automatically receive further volumes about once a month on the same risk-free basis. No minimum purchase is required, and you may cancel your subscription at any time.

This unique collection is not available in bookstores but only through this special offer. So to ensure you don't miss out, mail the reply coupon today.

### PREVIEW EACH BOOK FOR 15 DAYS FREE!

31203

☐ **YES**, please send me **Murder on the Orient Express** for a 15-day free-examination and enter my subscription to THE AGATHA CHRISTIE MYSTERY COLLECTION together with my free gift which is mine to keep whatever I decide. If I keep this first volume, I will pay just \$12.95 plus postage and handling (and sales tax in N.Y. and Canada). About once a month, I will receive another Christie mystery on the same fully refundable 15-day, free-examination basis. I understand there is no minimum number of books to buy, and I may cancel my subscription at any time.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

(please print)

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Apt.# \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

MAIL TO: 073AH

THE AGATHA CHRISTIE MYSTERY COLLECTION

Bantam Books, P.O. Box 957, Hicksville, NY 11802-0957

Orders subject to approval. Prices subject to change.

But no, when I felt around some more I found the door hinges and realized that the door opened outward, into the closet where I was. All I had to do was remove the rest of the shelves and clear enough floor space to open the door a crack so I could squeeze through—all without making any noise and alerting the guard.

The other shelves were nailed in securely. It seemed to take hours to pry them loose. The closet was hot and airless. By the time I was ready to open the door, my clothes were soaked with sweat, I was gritty with the dust that had accumulated for God knows how long in that closet, and I wondered what in the hell I was doing.

It was too late to wonder. I eased through the door and found myself in a small, cluttered office. Facing the door to the hallway where the guard was posted was an unimposing desk with a more imposing leather high-backed swivel chair behind it. To the right of the desk, against the far wall, was a row of file cabinets. In front of the desk were two other chairs, one wooden, straight-backed, the other an armchair upholstered in a florid print. Great decor.

I went to the desk. The desk calendar that was supposed to have had my name on it wasn't

there. I guessed the cops had taken it for evidence. There was a rectangle on the blotter, less faded than the rest, about the size and shape of a desk calendar. I poked around in the center desk drawer and found the usual detritus—pencils, paper clips, a letter opener, dried-up ballpoints. Nothing there. I tried the file cabinets. Locked. I went back to the desk. Where would he keep the key to the files? I looked in the right desk drawer. More junk. A magnifying glass, an old copy of the Federal Register, a committee report, a pair of scissors, some rubber bands. I picked up the Federal Register and flipped through it. Nothing of interest. The usual announcements of proposed rule-making, regulatory hearings, and so forth. I flipped through the committee report. A phone message slip fell out. It said:

To Cong. Rourke

Date 5/12 Time 3:30 PM

WHILE YOU WERE OUT

Mr. Ross Ward

of Sen. Prentiss' ofc.

Phone( )

PHONED X PLEASE CALL X

There was no message. The slip was signed "SH." Well, the sonofabitch had never called me back. Which was easy to understand, since I hadn't called

him in the first place. I hadn't even been in the office most of the afternoon. The senator had sent me off to represent him at an antiwar teach-in at George Washington University. That, of course, didn't prove I hadn't made the call; they had plenty of phones at G.W.

If I was going to find out who was using my name, I was going to have to talk to "SH." But first I took a closer look at the committee report where the call slip had been tucked away. It was about ten years old, the report of a select committee on labor racketeering. I had been on the minority staff of the committee and had, in fact, drafted the minority report. Some pundits credited that report for Rourke's loss in the 1960 election. It had taken him four years and a gerrymander after the 1960 census to make a comeback.

As I was putting the report back into the drawer, the office door opened.

"Returning to the scene of the crime, Ward?" It was Ralph, the short detective, and his tall friend was right behind him.

**S**pending the afternoon in the D.C. lockup gave me some time to step back and reflect on my situation. I was a lousy detec-

tive. In my various staff positions, my responsibilities had been administrative or legislative. We always had professional investigators to do legwork.

I realized that I was going about the business of investigation the wrong way. I was too self-absorbed, concerned only with protecting myself, covering my ass, like the administrator and sometime bureaucrat that I was. So I had gone looking for Fred, who could account for my whereabouts from eight thirty to ten thirty, and I had gone to Rourke's Capitol office to find out how my name had got on his calendar. What I really needed to know was who killed Rourke and why.

That meant I had to spend a little time thinking about Rourke. Let the police think about me. That seemed to be about as far as they could think.

So what did I know about Rourke? That he was slime. That the labor racketeering committee had uncovered evidence linking him with organized crime figures. That he had been in Congress for almost twenty years, with a break in service in the early sixties.

What about that career? Rourke had never held even a subcommittee chairmanship.

That was easier to explain, in those days. There were far fewer subcommittee chairmanships available than there are now. The 1971 reforms that forbade any House member to chair more than one subcommittee opened up almost twenty chairmanships. But with his length of service, even with the break and even in 1970, he should have been able to land some sort of chairmanship. So what was the problem? Lack of ambition? That didn't seem likely.

But what if his ambition was not the usual kind? What if he didn't care about political power and perks and recognition? What else was there? Money.

Some kinds of money came easily with the position and power that ordinary congressional ambition brings—campaign contributions, honoraria, patronage, staffing funds and office expenses, business opportunities, free rides on corporate aircraft, free vacations at fancy spas. But despite the popular notion of congressmen growing fat at the public trough, not that much of the money that came with position and power was bankable, and the more conspicuous a politician was—the higher his position, the greater his power—the more likely he was to find himself in

Drew Pearson's "Washington Merry-go-round" column—actually Jack Anderson's column then, since Pearson had died the year before.

I always thought the *Washington Post* had the true measure of Pearson's talents. They published his column on the same page with the comics. But there was very little in the column to laugh about for a politician who became Pearson's victim. Only recently the senior senator from Connecticut had been pilloried by Pearson for misusing political contributions. Tom Dodd was censured by his colleagues, many of whom had done no less than he had, and after the 1970 election, he would not return.

So it wasn't all bad for a congressman to be nearly anonymous if he wanted to make a lot of money by shady dealings. No one would look at him very closely. On the other hand, without the power and influence that came with a leadership position, there were a lot fewer opportunities for the kind of shady dealing that could make a congressman a lot of money.

I whiled away the afternoon trying out variations on that conundrum. I felt like a dog chasing his tail. By about five o'clock, my lawyer had ar-

ranged bail, and I was back on the street.

**R**ourke's regular office in the Longworth building was probably closed, had probably been closed all day, under the circumstances. So there was no point in dropping by to see if I could find "SH," who had supposedly taken the message that I had called. What to do?

I went home, took a shower, poured myself a stiff scotch, and got out my Congressional Staff Directory. There was one person on Rourke's staff with the initials S.H., Sharon Holman, the congressman's personal secretary. I looked in the phone book to see if I could find her home address. There were plenty of Holmans in the Maryland and Virginia suburbs, none of them Sharon. In D.C., however, there was one S. Holman at an address on Massachusetts Avenue N.E. about ten blocks from the Capitol. Only about four blocks from my house. I tried the phone number. No answer.

I decided to stroll down Mass. Ave. and have a look at S. Holman's address. It was about seven o'clock when I set out. Still daylight, and hot and muggy, as is usual for Washington at that time of year. I cut across Lincoln Park, where

Dutch elm disease was killing off the few remaining trees, pausing only briefly to look at the greenish bronze of the Great Emancipator going about his business of emancipation.

I wasn't in any hurry because I didn't know what I would do when I got there. Considering how the day had gone so far, I was afraid that whatever I did would be the wrong thing.

The address of S. Holman was a two story townhouse, with a basement apartment, dating from around the turn of the century like most of the houses in the neighborhood. I went up the iron stairs to the front door. Apparently the upper floors of the house had been divided into two apartments. There were two mailboxes and two doorbell buttons. The mailboxes were labeled R. Lawrence and G. Cowley.

I went down and checked the mailbox at the basement apartment. S. Holman. I was trying to peer through the ground-level window when I heard a familiar voice.

"Looks like we got you on a peeping charge this time."

"Shut up, Ralph," said the tall detective. "Mr. Ward, we've been looking for you."

"Why? You had me all afternoon."



"We want to ask you some additional questions."

"I'd like to ask you a few questions," I responded. "Have you talked to this Holman dame?"

"Let me explain the procedure to you," said Ralph. "We ask the questions, you answer."

"Yes, Mr. Ward, we have. In fact Miss Holman told us the story of your altercation with Congressman Rourke at the Shoreham," said the tall detective. "We wanted to ask you about another matter having to do with your relations with Congressman Rourke."

"The labor racketeering investigation."

"Yes. The report you were putting back in the congressman's desk this morning."

"So? What's your question? The information that's in that report would be a good reason for Rourke to kill me, but what does it have to do with your theory that I killed him?"

"A lot of motives for murder are reversible. I want something you have. I might kill you for it. On the other hand, you might kill me to keep me from getting it. In this case, Congressman Rourke had a grudge against you. That made him a dangerous enemy. You might have wanted him out of the way."

"So I called him up, left a trail of phone messages, bumped him off, and made sure my name was on his desk calendar and a handy reminder of the racketeering investigation was in his desk drawer," I said. "I may not be at the top of my form this week, but somehow that just doesn't sound like me."

"So maybe it wasn't premeditated. Maybe you went to talk to Rourke about something else, and he brought up the bad old days. Maybe you got pissed off," said Ralph.

"Right. So we slapped leather and he came out second best. I blew the smoke off my six-shooter and rode on out of there. Look, Ralph, get back to me when you have something better than 'maybe.'"

"Mr. Ward, we do have something better. According to Miss Holman, you called the congressman's office at three thirty the afternoon of the murder, just like it says on that phone message slip that was tucked in the report of the labor racketeering committee."

"That could have been anybody," I said.

"No. That was you, unless there is more than one Ross Ward in Senator Prentiss' office. According to Miss Holman, she called you back, at the congressman's instructions, and

arranged the appointment for you to meet him at the Capitol at seven thirty."

If S. Holman had really said that, I knew that she was lying, but there was no point in saying so. "She's lying," I said.

We discussed it awhile longer, but the cops decided they weren't ready to take me back downtown. So with the usual warnings about staying in the Washington area, they left me standing on the curb in front of Sharon Holman's apartment.

I walked on along Mass. Ave. to D Street and stopped at the Monocle for dinner. I hadn't eaten anything all day, and starvation wasn't helping my thought processes.

I ate at the bar. Chopped sirloin stuffed with gorgonzola, the cheapest item on the menu, but also one of the best. As I tucked into my chopped sirloin, I tried once again to sort out the day's events. According to the evidence, I had called Rourke, and then his secretary had called me back and set up an appointment for seven thirty. The committee report with the telephone message stuck in it suggested that the meeting was to have something to do with the old labor racketeering investigation.

But I knew that I hadn't made or received the calls. So Sharon Holman, Rourke's secretary, had to be lying, right? She was the one who signed the phone message slip, she was the one who told the cops she had talked to me. Why did she want to frame me? Because I had a good, believable motive. Does that mean she did it? Plenty of secretaries must have motives to murder their bosses, so that's not implausible. A boss like Rourke probably provided a new motive every day of the week. Maybe I should look into Miss Sharon's whereabouts at the time of the murder. I decided to walk around to her Mass. Ave. apartment again to see if I could find her at home.

But first I walked around the corner to the Carroll Arms to see Fred the bartender, my alibi. Fred was a few years deeper into middle age than I was and looked it, despite his relatively smooth, light brown skin. Years spent in dark cocktail lounges had, no doubt, protected him from sun damage but had done nothing to prevent the receding of his hairline, the concavity of his cheeks, or the grey bristles in his mustache.

I found him behind the bar pouring a pousse-cafe, a delicate operation. In what seemed

to be one flowing movement, he topped off the liqueur, delivered it to the wait station, filled a glass with ice and three fingers of scotch, and set it on a cocktail napkin on my corner of the bar. Most of us are such creatures of habit that by the time we've been to a place two or three times the bartender recognizes us immediately—as scotch-rocks, G & T, bourbon, or whatever.

“What if I wanted a pousse-cafe?” I asked.

“You don’t.”

“No. But it’s . . . depressing to be so predictable.”

“Mos’ things is predictable.”

“Yeah? Well, predict this. What are those two cops—Mutt and Jeff—going to do with me?”

“Th’ow yo’ ass in jail, if they can pin the congressman’s murder on you.”

“You’re right. Mos’ things is predictable.”

“Yeah. But you ask who do I think done it, I bet on them hippies camped out on the Mall.”

“The peace and love crowd? Some of them would sure be capable of it, but why? Randy was no dove, but he wasn’t exactly a leading hawk, either. He waffled all over the place.”

“Yeah. And they’s a special place in Hell for people like him.”

Amazing Fred. Who would have thought that he had read Dante. In the vestibule of Hell, before Limbo, the first circle, were the opportunists, those who failed to take a stand either for good or evil.

Well, at least Fred had told the cops that I had been at his bar for part of the time when the murder might have been committed. So everybody wasn’t trying to put me at the scene of the crime. But why was Sharon Holman lying about the telephone call? Fred’s hippie theory didn’t explain that.

I left the Carroll Arms and walked back up Mass. Ave. to the Holman residence. It was just beginning to get dark, and traffic along the avenue had subsided, but it was still hot and humid. There was not a breath of breeze.

As I stood on the sidewalk wondering whether Miss Holman was at home to suspected murderers, a light came on in the apartment. I stepped down to the basement door and rapped gently.

“Who’s there?”

“Miss Holman?”

“Yes.”

“Ross Ward.”

“Go away.”

“Miss Holman—”

“Go away, or I’ll call the police.”

"Please. I just want to talk to you for a minute. It's important."

No answer.

"You know what it's about," I babbled on, "and I can understand your reluctance to see me, but believe me, I'm not a threat to you . . ."

The door opened, with the security chain on, and she looked at me curiously. And she was some looker. Dark brown hair, hazel eyes, fair skin as smooth as satin. She seemed puzzled.

"Could you show me some identification, please?"

Now that was the last thing I had expected—to have to prove I was the guy accused of killing her boss. Really, if I had had any sense in the first place, I would have told her I was the Avon lady just to get her to open the door.

"I didn't know I was so persuasive," I said. "What about the police?"

"Maybe later. I.D.?"

I showed her my Senate staff card, which hadn't been taken from me when I was canned. The mug shot made me look like public enemy number one. It was a good likeness.

Then the damnedest thing happened. She unhooked the chain and invited me in.

I knew that I wasn't a murderer, but I didn't know that she wasn't, but she seemed to

know that I wasn't—my head swam— " 'Come into my parlor,' said the spider to the fly."

So I did. And she didn't pull a gun on me and no one sapped me from behind with a blackjack and I wasn't carved up with a butcher knife and sent off parcel post to the four points of the compass—any of which could have spoiled my day, such as it was, but none of which would have particularly surprised me at that point.

No. She offered me coffee, black, no arsenic.

Sharon was quite a nice girl. Mid-to-late twenties, Smith graduate, former high school teacher. She had worked for Rourke about a year and a half and was as fed up with him as most people who knew him. She was probably capable of murder—like most of us—but wasn't responsible for the murder in question. So she said.

"Well," I said, "if you didn't do it, why did you try to frame me?"

"I didn't."

"Then who told the cops that I called Rourke and made an appointment to see him? Who told the cops about my set-to with Rourke at the Shoreham?"

"I did."

"?"

"Look, Mr. Ward, I'm as confused about this as you are. When I told the congressman

you wanted to see him, he told me about the Shoreham incident. So I told the police. But . . .”

“But what?”

“That wasn’t you. It wasn’t your voice on the phone.”

“Thanks. But you seem awfully sure about a voice on the phone. Maybe I was mumbling through a handkerchief.”

“No. The voice was clear. And there is one other thing. You say you have an alibi for about eight thirty to ten thirty. Well, the congressman was still alive at eight thirty. I stopped by the Capitol office just before I left, a little before nine. You were over an hour late, and he was in a stew. Actually, you might say he was stewed. He’d been drinking.”

“Did you tell the cops this?”

“Yes.”

Well, I thought, that explains why Mutt and Jeff haven’t strapped me into the electric chair yet.

Another thing that was suddenly clear to me was who must have done the murder. What wasn’t clear was why.

“Sharon, what can you tell me about your late boss?”

“He had no principles, he hung out with some pretty shady characters, he drank too much . . .”

“No. I mean something I don’t know. Something about

. . . oh, how he ran his office, for instance.”

“You mean like overpaying staff and demanding kickbacks so we could keep our jobs, or converting campaign funds to personal use, or peddling influence? They say he’s done all those things and several others that you haven’t even thought of. But I couldn’t prove it. Most of the stories I’ve heard date from before his current term.”

“You mean he’s been running a clean operation?”

“I wouldn’t swear to that, either.”

“Tell me about that hide-away office in the Capitol.”

“What’s to tell?” she shrugged. “He hung out there most afternoons and evenings with a bottle. Occasionally he invited in other members or senior staff—like you, or whoever was supposed to be you.”

“What’s in all those file cabinets in the office?”

“How do you know about them? I thought . . .”

I really didn’t want to tell her how stupid I had been, breaking into the office like a murderer returning, proverbially, to the scene of the crime.

But I did anyway. She didn’t know what was in the files, had never been in the office when the cabinets were unlocked. I was beginning to think I might know what was in the files, and

if I was right, the police would soon know, too. But that might not help much, since the relevant file was almost certainly gone, stolen by the murderer.

So I wasn't through being stupid for the day. Back on the street, I cut over to Constitution Avenue and headed toward the Old Senate Office Building.

Security on Capitol Hill was not nearly so tight in those days as it is now. There was only a single guard at a table near the C Street entrance of the Old S.O.B. Since he recognized me, he waved me through. I found the door to Senator Prentiss' office suite locked. I still had my key, so I let myself in.

A voice called from the senator's office: "Who's there?"

"It's me, senator," I answered.

"Oh, hello, Ross," he said stepping into the reception area, "you want to pick up personal belongings from your office?"

"No. I want to ask you a question."

"And what's that?"

"Why did you kill Randy Rourke?"

"Ross, Ross, how could you believe that of me?"

You have to hand it to the guy—that sincere, hurt tone, that big, open face. He almost

had me wondering if I was wrong. What a politician.

"Come into my office," he said. "Let's talk about this."

In keeping with the general policy of stupidity that I had established for the day, I followed him into his office.

"Let me show you something," he said, lowering himself into the big leather swivel chair behind his desk.

"The file?" I asked.

"No. I've . . . taken care of that." He opened the desk drawer and pulled out a .38 snub-nose.

"Come on," I said. "You're not going to shoot me. Not in your own office."

"Why not? This is the gun that killed Rourke. It's not registered. It's untraceable. I took it away from you in the struggle. You were tragically shot. Case closed."

"You've got a point," I said.

"Yeah. But if he parts his hair right it won't show." It was the unmistakable wit and humor of Ralph, the detective.

**W**ho would have believed that Mutt and Jeff actually knew what they were doing? Since my alibi had checked out, they knew, just as I did, that the murderer had to be either Sharon Holman or someone in Senator Prentiss'

office, someone who could answer my phone when Sharon called back to confirm my appointment with Rourke.

They also had the advantage of knowing what I only suspected. Rourke's files were loaded with blackmail material on half the Congress and a healthy percentage of the executive branch. He apparently ran a lucrative business in selling votes, not just his own. Selling your own vote happens occasionally—only a few months before, in December 1969, Senator Daniel Brewster of Maryland had been indicted for accepting about twenty-five thousand dollars from a large mail-order company that wanted his help on the Post Office and Civil Service Committee. But if you've got the leverage to sell another member's votes . . . well, you do the arithmetic. It comes to a lot of money.

But it was just a matter of time before Rourke pressed his luck with somebody like Prentiss.

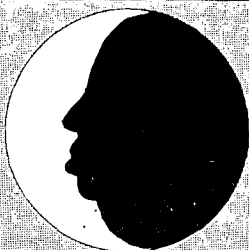
I haven't got much to be proud of in the whole affair. I was mostly just lucky—and some of my luck was bad. The finer points of the frame, for example, hadn't been crafted by Prentiss at all. Rourke himself

had dug up that old committee report and stuck the phone message in it because he really thought he was meeting me. But most of my luck was good. If Prentiss had shown up on time for the appointment or if Sharon had not looked in on Rourke after eight thirty, the frame would have fit perfectly. And if this had all happened twenty years later, Prentiss could probably have walked away with all of Rourke's files on a handful of floppy disks, so nobody would ever know for sure what he'd been up to.

One last word. Since you probably hold the typical, all-American opinion of Congress, I can almost hear your thoughts: "He was blackmailing that many congressmen? I always knew those guys were a bunch of crooks." Don't believe it. In Robert Penn Warren's novel *All the King's Men*, Willie Stark orders his aide Jack Burden to get some dirt on a political opponent. Burden says there might not be anything, and Stark replies, "Man is conceived in sin and born in corruption and he passeth from the stink of the didie to the stench of the shroud. There is always something."

Just remember that.





# FULFILL YOUR NIGHTMARES

Enjoy chilling tales of mystery and suspense. Sometimes humorous, sometimes nightmarish. But always an intriguing puzzle.

## ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE

### AND SAVE 25%

☐ Please send me 18 issues of **ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE**

for \$28.97--I save 25% off the basic price.

☐ Please send me 12 issues of **ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE**

for \$19.97--I save 22% off the basic price.

Mail to: **ALFRED HITCHCOCK**  
P.O. Box 7055  
Red Oak, IA 51591

OR CALL 1-800-333-3311

- ☐ Payment Enclosed  
☐ Bill Me  
☐ Charge (Circle One)



Card # \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Outside U.S. & Possessions, 12 for \$27.97,  
18 for \$39.97 (Payment with order, U.S.  
funds). Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery  
of your first issues. Includes GST.

City \_\_\_\_\_ ST \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

HZSC-5

We publish two double issues, in June and Mid-December.  
Each double issue counts as two towards your subscription.

FICTION

# Isn't It Wonderful!

by Frank Orenstein



I took Millie home to meet Mother. Afterwards, when we were alone, Mother said, "I think she's very nice, dear. Very pretty."

Tepid words, perhaps, but a tremendous improvement on the more customary remarks such as, "Where did you meet her?," always less a question than a judgment. Especially when enunciated in a slightly fluty tone straining to sound casual.

She couldn't resist adding, "Of course the girl would be even prettier if she did something with her hair," an observation accompanied by a vague flipping of the hand as if one couldn't be quite sure what that something could possibly be.

Nevertheless, I was satisfied. My father had died when I was in my teens, and Mother was afraid of losing me as well, as if my father's death and my potential departure for another woman might have constituted some failure on her part or, if not that, at least an unfair abandonment by an ungrateful male. Fortunately, this possessive streak failed to show up until she faced widowhood, and by then I was too well set into my own character to be overpowered by her needs. Her neurotic needs, my analyst emphasizes.

Poor Mother. I hadn't yet told her that Millie and I were planning on a June wedding. That was still more than half a year off, and we decided to let her have a month or two to resign herself to the inevitable before we put it into irrevocable words.

As I looked back, I could see signs in the past that to Mother the world was a hostile place. Uncertainty and the unknown were synonymous with a kind of evil, and her role was to mount the walls and guard her loved ones against invasion. One example stays with me from distant childhood: when we rode a city bus, if there were no seats, I was not allowed to hold onto a pole to steady myself, not unless I was wearing gloves. Instead, I was to clutch at Mother's arm.

Years later I teased her about this. "Afraid of germs with big teeth, Ma?"

She was too bright to admit to anything like that. Not directly, at any rate. "Don't try to be funny, Tommy. You were always catching cold when you were a child. And Lord only knew who'd been grabbing at those poles before us."

Certainty was the name of the game. When I visited my grandparents across town, I was allowed, after reaching the glorious double-digit age of ten,

to go by myself. Mother insisted, though, on making me repeat the answers to her questions about what I would ask of the conductor of the first bus as soon as I boarded, where the transfer point was, and what the numbers of the two buses were. It was a kind of catechism I can still recite: "Transfer, please; the corner of Nostrand and Van Buren; Number 18 and Number 5." In addition, she bought me a little wallet that always held an extra dollar. She made a game of it, saying that a grownup boy should have a wallet of his own, but I think I knew even then that the main point was the card with my name, address, and telephone number behind the clear plastic window. Emergencies had to be anticipated. I still have that wallet, though God knows why. It is brown, and it bears a picture of Mickey Mouse in the lower right-hand corner, red, white, and black, though the coloring has been largely scraped away by the years.

I won't deny that this has shaped me in some ways. I'm a botanist, and so much of botany is an exercise in classifying, assigning what grows out of the good green earth to its proper place in the world of genera, classes, species, files, and folders. The comfortable order of

things sets a cosy tone that I find agreeable. So be it.

At the time of my marriage to Millie I was, and I still am, five years later, a science teacher in a private school for the children of the rich on Manhattan's East Side. My specialty, of course, is botany, but I manage quite well with the other natural sciences. (Fortunately, I have to deal only with Newtonian physics, and not with the strange uncertainties of a physics that entertains odd notions such as matter's being a wave of probability.) The only change has been that now Millie is gone.

Like me, the children in the school are accustomed to an urban view of reality. They live in boxlike rooms in boxlike buildings set on rectangular blocks bounded by straight thoroughfares where the traffic takes turns going in one direction and then the other according to the predictable rhythm of the traffic lights. Their parents prosper in those byways of society—the law, medicine, finance, commerce—that in spite of human failings attempt to govern themselves by specific rules of behavior. Life tries to be a measured minuet for such people and their children, not a wild modern dance of symbols and agonies and hidden mean-

ings. The children, most of them anyway, and I understood each other.

Millie was quite the opposite. If my life was a collection of efficiently nested containers, hers was a free flowing one, a stream that went swiftly in one direction only to veer suddenly around the distraction of this hillock or that boulder and continue uninhibitedly on some fresh adventure. The notion of heading steadily toward a particular goal never arose. Why bother? Why not take the path of the moment? Why limit yourself?

In the first year or so of marriage, each of us seemed to give the other something the other lacked. For Millie, I think I was a form of security, always there, always reliable, always steady. (Later that reliability came to look more like a dun-colored predictability to poor Millie. At least I suspect that to have been the case.) And for me, Millie was a breath of air, an invitation to let go, forget the rules, enjoy the moment. (By the time we both turned thirty I'm afraid I began to find an unseemly and embarrassing childishness, even irresponsibility, in living like an infant constantly in search of some new and instant gratification.)

But there's no denying that we were in a kind of heaven for

a little while. We used to take brief vacations in the cabin Mother's grandfather had bought so very long ago in the Adirondacks. It bordered on a vast tract of state park, and since Mother had lost interest in the place as she marched like a trouser into the darkened recesses of old age, we youngsters had our own private wilderness just out back, rugged mountains, chasms, sudden stone walls, icy streams, deer, raccoons, even the occasional bear as our unpredictable playmates. Millie was forever dragging me down overgrown paths, inevitably getting us lost, and I was forever slowing down the ramble by plucking weeds and wildflowers for later identification. (If I suspected any were endangered species, I would delay us even further by sketching the blossom, stem, and leaves, leaving the object of my curiosity to continue in the ground as best it could.)

Back in the city, I taught Millie the pleasures of sitting still for the theater, and even for popularized lectures in museums and other public institutions on art, politics, music, and whatever else was listed in the press.

To sum it up differently, my life went forward by the rules of cause and effect, actions and reactions. Millie lived by tan-

gents and associations. For me, because of this, that occurred; for her, this occurred and then that occurred. Causal relationships versus and then and then and then.

It couldn't last. I would find myself waiting for Millie to exclaim suddenly, "Ooh, isn't it wonderful!" yet another time at something unbearably trivial, like five Number 104 buses going down Broadway almost in tandem, followed by a radio announcement that evening that lottery ticket 5103, almost the same number, had won an obscene amount of money in New York or Jersey or Connecticut. "Ooh, isn't it wonderful!" My head would pound.

We would come across a clump of chicory in bloom behind the cabin, the delicate blue petals charming us both. I would admire this member of the Composite Daisy family, but Millie would see not the flower but the color of a beautiful dress a friend had worn to a high school dance back in Illinois. She would, inevitably, call the friend's parents that night and equally inevitably, to my disgust, find that the girl was now living in New York just a few blocks from us. The friendship was renewed. And wasn't *that* wonderful, too. Always off on a tangent.

And her monologues. A suggestion that we eat in a Chinese restaurant on Broadway instead of cooking in would meander through recollections of a Chinese restaurant once gone to with Mary X, who was related to minor movie star Mary Y and who lived in California, and did I remember Mary Z, who married Joe Q from Berkeley, and did I know what happened to my bearded hippie friend out there and wasn't the drug problem terrible in the sixties, not to mention right here on Broadway.

I interrupted that one. "Millie, will you stick to the goddamn point? You want a Chinese restaurant, you'll get a Chinese restaurant. Let it alone, will you? If whatever explorer it was, LaSalle or God knows who, set out to go down the Mississippi from the source to the mouth but then turned up every stinking tributary on the way, tooling up and back down the Ohio and up and down the Missouri and anything else along the way, he never would have got to the end." I nearly ran out of breath. "He would have died of old age first. That's just like you. Please, Millie, please! Stick to the point! Please?"

"Wasn't that an old automobile, LaSalle? I think Daddy said his grandfather had one.



That was my great-grandfather I told you about who owned this silver mine in Colorado, or maybe he was only partners in it and—”

Sometimes she would even forget what she had set out to say, and she'd wrinkle her nose like a teenager and giggle, “Where was I?” I grabbed my coat and took off for McDonald's. I don't know what she did. By unspoken agreement we didn't mention the incident again.

Naturally, since my wife had dismissed the world of logical progression, the world of the spirit filled the hiatus very nicely, thank you. At her behest we went for a weekend stay in Woodstock. I should have suspected the town would be full of the types I find particularly distasteful, young people who think that breathing the same air that sustained serious artists a few generations ago would somehow turn them too into creative geniuses. There were barefoot young men with eyes focused on some distant point which was apparently the source of a kind of man that would turn them into poets. And their equally barefoot women in granny skirts and embroidered dirndl blouses, the better to display their dirty shoulder straps, padded about

with decks of tarot cards at the ready.

Just Millie's speed. She loved it all, and brought back a depressing array of new enthusiasms, all of which were wonderful! At the start of the school year, there was a reception for faculty and spouses. To my acute distress, Millie set out to explain the world beyond to my fellow workers. “It isn't,” she said, “that the realm of magic and spirits is real, but wouldn't it be wonderful if it were! Life would be so much richer that way. I mean, the tarot cards can't really predict your future, but isn't it fun to believe in them anyway! I think we should have a law giving equal rights to the spirit world. We'd all be so much happier, don't you think?” She tried to look a kittenish eighteen and failed miserably.

No, they didn't think. Eyes were cast down awkwardly, though I felt myself under occasional appraisal by one or another of my colleagues, wondering either how far I went along with this mindless drivel or how I could stand it.

My work suffered. I started snapping at the children. Mother, who was no fool, saw that Millie and I were getting along badly, and to my dismay, she took Millie's side. “Why don't you relax, Tommy?” she'd



say. "Millie's got spirit, and you could use a dollop of that yourself."

Ultimately, we lived together in near silence punctuated by occasional sour outbreaks. I watched Millie at the dinner table, lost in space and playing absentmindedly with her food, mixing together peas and bits of stew and mashed potatoes until the amalgam looked like the desolate aftermath of the landscape around Chernobyl. "Must you play with your food?" I asked. "What in hell are you doing, probing its innermost soul? Something like that?"

"No," she said, "nothing like that. Only trying to strike a balance with you, Tommy. I never knew anyone before who'd pat mashed potatoes flat, slice them into little cubes with his knife, and then eat them one by one by one by goddamn one! How do they come out the other end, Tommy, in little gift-wrapped packages? And by the way, sweetheart, if *you* had gone the length of the Mississippi, you wouldn't have seen a stinking thing except for sixteen varieties of nasty weeds growing along the banks." She must have been brooding on that one just about forever.

With that, she ran out of the house and came back two hours later trying to project the im-

age of a wounded soul who had walked along the river in a personal agony. Frankly, I think she probably went to the movies, but that's a thought I won't insist on.

I came to the conclusion, and I stuck to it. Divorce was out of the question. The parents' association at school was very stuffy on matters that touched on what they felt was the moral fiber of the faculty. This may have been because their own homes provided the children with so few examples of marital constancy that they'd decided the school faculty should correct the imbalance. I'm sure they couldn't have fired me, but the rich and powerful have their ways, and I was taking no chances.

I made my peace with Millie, though at times I was sure my teeth would end up ground down to the gums. I listened to her babble and smiled. I bought her a Ouija board and was in enthusiastic attendance at the sessions she arranged with others of her ilk; free spirits manqué, poets manqué, and, alas, brains manqué. The board gave us profound answers to practically everything, particularly when Millie controlled it, and I agreed, along with everyone else, that yes, it was indeed wonderful. I wished wholeheartedly that one of her pro-

genitors had in fact been along with LaSalle and had led the expedition, Millie-like, off to one side, up the Red River, there to be slaughtered by Indians deep in the heart of Texas, thus stopping cold the family tree that was currently plunging its roots into my very being.

Finally, during school recess in December we went up to the cabin, still so far as the world was concerned on the best of terms. Mother, who hadn't been well, declined to join us, and instead flew off to Florida, seeking warmth. On Christmas Day I called her. A friend answered the phone and broke the news: Mother was seriously ill, so much so that a doctor had actually paid a house call and had ordered her remanded to the hospital. The friend was picking up her toiletries, pajamas, and slippers when I called. I said I would get the first plane down, which would probably be the next day, out of Albany.

The situation was made to order. Millie agreed that I had better set off for Albany well in advance, since it looked very much as if it might start snowing by evening. One of the local folk would drive me down for a nominal fee, and I'd leave our car for Millie.

"I'm sorry, dear," I said.

"No, no, don't you worry about me. Just call me after you see Mother, and give her my love."

I agreed and made the arrangements. Then I had what I hoped sounded like a sudden bright idea. "Look, Millie, we've got a couple of hours until the car picks me up. Let's take a walk out back before the snow gets here."

"Oh, that'd be wonderful!"

I ground my teeth.

We headed out. Millie always liked to explore new paths, the faux LaSalle of her mind always eager for free association, and I urged her on. "Did I ever tell you about the old Indian ruin up over the rise?" She shook her head. "Well, you know the chestnut stump near the laurel grove?" There was no such stump as far as I knew.

She frowned and said, "I'm not sure. But I think so. Yes!" She looked eager.

"It's to the left there, through the edge of the grove until we get to a trail that heads west toward the cliff. Let's go."

She jumped up and down and clapped her hands, another endearing habit she had developed to hold back the advent of the middle years. "Goody! Let's hurry on."

I led my dear girl up hill and down dale for as long as I dared. "Look, Millie," I said, "I think

I'd better get back, but we're at least three-quarters there, so why don't you go ahead."

She looked uncertain. "Gee, I don't know. What if it snows? I'd hate to get caught out in it."

"Believe this old trapper, honey. It'll hold off for at least another two hours. Now look: All you have to do is—" I gave her God knows what instructions about turning right or left or going straight on, looking for a fallen white pine—there was bound to be one—and then finding the ruins of an old stone hut which was certain to have arrowheads aplenty on the ground whimpering to be found there by my dearest pussycat. Before she could consider the matter further I kissed her. "See you soon, hon. I'll call from the hospital tomorrow. Take care!" And I was off.

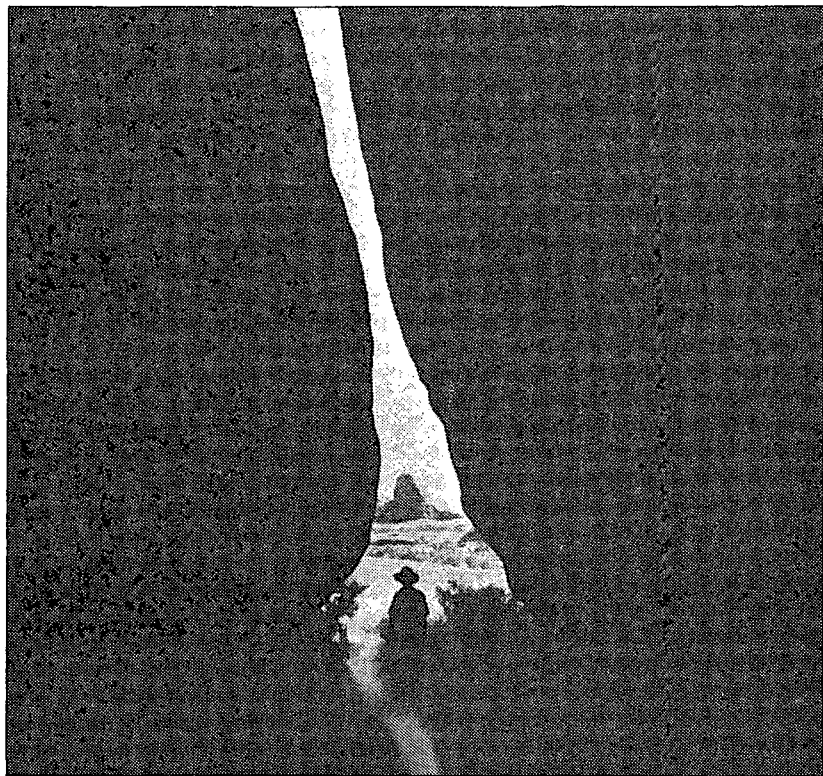
Back at the cabin I packed a bag and sat down at the table

to write a note. "Sweetiepie," I wrote, "Sitting here waiting for the car. Hope you'll be bringing me back lots of treasures from the cliff, at least diamonds and rubies. Still not snowing here, and I know you'll hustle your buns back to the woodstove if the weather looks like closing down. I'll call you from the hospital tomorrow. Love and kisses, T."

I sat back and looked out the window. It was as dark as two in the afternoon can get, and the wind was vibrating through the bare tree branches. Not constantly, not yet, but it was beginning. The trees were swaying; the forest was restless. A few snowflakes drifted by, only a few, but they were fat and juicy and I knew they had lots of eager relatives, millions of them, just a couple of thousand feet higher up in the frigid air.

And wasn't *that* wonderful!

# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



© 1990 by Mark Klett

But who made the path? We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less, and be sure to include a crime), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine, 1540 Broadway, New York, New York 10036. Please label your entry "July Contest," and write your name and address on the story you submit.

The winning entry for the February Mysterious Photograph contest will be found on page 155.



FICTION

# G-Men and Old Loves

by D. L. Richardson

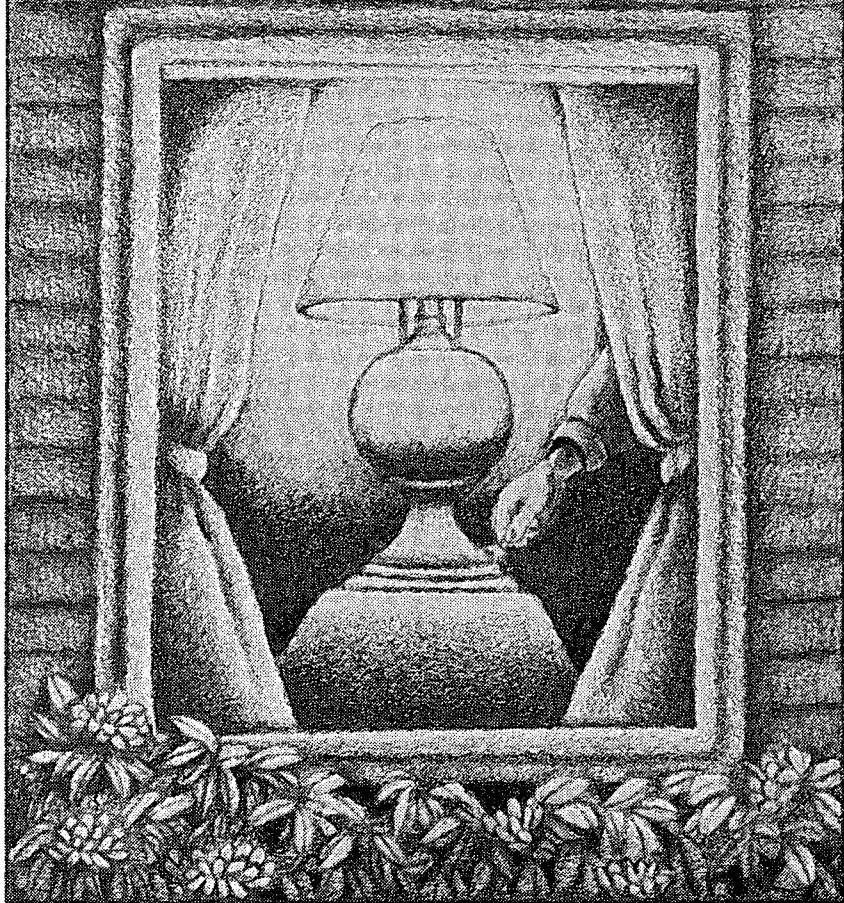


Illustration by Caryn King

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The guys at table six had Fed written all over them. Shaking my head, I rechecked the juggled week-end work schedule. You'd think the government would wake up and quit turning out cookie cutter agents so indistinguishable from each other that I sometimes wondered if their own families would notice if they switched places.

I'd had enough contact with them when I'd been on the police force to know they even thought alike, and cooperation with the locals was not part of their mind-set. Which had made for more problems than solutions and one verbal confrontation that, while cheered by my fellow officers, had earned me an unofficial reprimand.

But that had been another life, another Cassandra Dillon. This Cass Dillon, half owner of Dillon's, had new headaches to contend with, like flu outbreaks and double shifts and a hyperactive chef and a laundry service that didn't pride itself on punctuality and a liquor supplier who couldn't count worth spit.

I waggled my clipboard at the bartender. "New schedule, Bobby. I've got you down for a double shift Saturday."

A strategically combed lock of sun-streaked hair just

missed his green eyes. "My girlfriend will be working on a term paper. I might as well be here earning some extra money."

"How's the liquor inventory coming?" I asked.

"Almost finished. We may need a few things to get through the weekend."

"Just let me know." I handed my clipboard across the bar to him. "See that this gets posted."

"Sure thing."

I started toward the office, but as I passed the dining room, table six caught my attention again. Lunch hour had been on the slow side, and at two o'clock only three other tables were still occupied.

Since long, leisurely lunches weren't part of a federal agent's style, I let my gaze slide over the remaining patrons. Other than Juan the busboy, who sports a ponytail and three gold studs in his left ear, the Feds were the most suspicious looking people in the place.

An uneasy feeling tried to wriggle its way into my psyche. Starting on the opposite side of the room, I chatted with the women lingering over coffee or piña coladas, admired a sleeping baby, accepted compliments on behalf of the chef. By the time I made it to my real destination, my hostess-with-

the-mostest smile was firmly in place.

"May I bring you gentlemen anything else? Dessert? More coffee?" A pair of sunglasses.

"No, thank you," the dark-haired one said, the polite smile not reaching his equally dark eyes.

I glanced at their plates. "How was the chicken salad? The chef tried something new." It was a lie, but they had no way of knowing.

"Fine, fine," the gray-eyed one said. "Everything was fine."

"Take my advice, fellas. Don't give up your day jobs to become restaurant critics."

Their laughter was forced and a beat too late to be spontaneous.

Dark Eyes indicated his companion. "As long as it can't crawl off his plate, Fred here is happy."

Fred. Give me a break. "If you're finished I can get these dishes out of your way."

"Does the owner always bus tables?" Gray Eyes asked.

I didn't miss the sharp look his partner gave him. "She does when there's a flu epidemic among her staff." I smiled. "Are you sure I can't get you something else?"

"Just the check, please.

"I'll send your server out."

With my hands full, I headed for the kitchen. Dammit to hell.

Karen, looking frazzled and pale, came charging out of the kitchen. "Oh, geez, Ms. Dillon, I was just coming to do that." She pushed the door open for me.

"No problem, Karen." I deposited the dishes in a plastic tub. "Do me a favor and wait five minutes before you take them the check. And don't be in any hurry with their change. Let me borrow your pen."

She pulled it from behind her right ear and pushed back an errant strand of curly strawberry blonde hair. "These guys cops or bad guys?"

"Depends on your perspective."

I used the delivery door to let myself out into the brisk afternoon. A cold front sweeping down out of Canada was going to make thinblooded Floridians shiver for the next couple of days. It took about two minutes to locate the car. I pushed up my sleeve and wrote the license number on the inside of my forearm. Sweaty palms at an inopportune time had broken me of writing important information on the palm of my hand.

I was back at the bar, sleeve rolled down, busy glancing over the completed liquor inventory when the two men, clones in gray, left.



When the front door closed, I put the clipboard down. "Call Russo's and order what we need, Bobby. I'll be in the office."

"Sure thing."

Sunlight streamed through the one window of the tiny office. As I sat down, the desk chair reminded me I hadn't done anything about its latest squeak. I contemplated the closed door and then rolled up my sleeve to study the numbers written on my arm. I copied the sequence onto a notepad and stared some more.

They didn't rearrange or identify themselves or magically disappear as if to prove me paranoid. They stared back, defying me with their silent "Okay, now what are you going to do?"

Good question.

I didn't need anyone to confirm they were federal. But what? FBI? Justice? Secret Service? ATF?

I had contacts who would at least tell me what motor pool had signed out the car. But those contacts were two years old, and I had sworn never to use them again. Of course, I'd already broken that promise once when I'd helped a friend from the force out of what could have been a very sticky situation. And the favor I was doing for Tad, close friend and busi-

ness partner, amounted to investigative work, something else I'd sworn off.

Angrily, I jerked open a desk drawer, rummaged until I found one of those packaged moistened towelettes, and scrubbed my arm.

Why were federal agents checking out my restaurant and, more specifically, me? Because that's exactly what they'd been doing. I had felt their eyes follow me around the dining room just as surely as I had felt the tension when I approached their table.

I ripped the sheet from the notepad and put it under the desk blotter that doubled as a calendar. When and *if* the government wanted me in on the secret, they'd let me know. Until then, I had more than enough to occupy my time.

Like easing Tad's mind about his ex-girlfriend's brand new fiancé. The only problem—other than a staff shortage that kept me on a short tether—was that a lack of progress toward that goal had sent a tremor through my mental warning bells.

After making sure the office door was locked, I changed from skirt and blouse to jeans, turtleneck, and sweatshirt. The desk chair screeched again when I sat down to tie the Nikes.

I would have said no to anyone else. I had loved being a cop, had never felt so alive as when I was in the middle of a case, wading through the muck and mire, the bobbing and feinting until I got to the truth. And when that had come to an abrupt and untimely halt, I had done the only thing I knew to do to preserve my sanity—turned my back on it completely.

No private investigator's license. No security consulting firm. A brand new life as half owner of a restaurant. I didn't encourage police clientele. I even avoided driving by the local police headquarters and the sheriff's station. Cassandra Dillon the cop didn't live in this body any more.

But Tad was my closest friend, a lifeline when I'd been going down for the third time in a pool of self-pity and aimlessness. Even though his concern for his ex-girlfriend had seemed genuine—Tad's a terrible dissembler—I had questioned his real motives.

We had been in the office, the door slightly ajar to admit the occasional sounds of nightly cleanup.

"I always thought you and Nancy would eventually marry." I had said it nonchalantly, using what Vinnie, my

partner in crime detection, had called my backdoor approach.

Tad shrugged. "Things don't always work out the way you expect."

"And now she's engaged to be married. To someone she met through the advertising agency she works for?"

Tad nodded. "She's known him about a year."

"And the two of you broke up—what? Six, eight months ago?"

Tad leveled his navy blue eyes at me. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"You tell me," I said gently.

"Sounds suspiciously like an accusation of jealousy." A rare flash of anger momentarily tightened his jawline, giving him a hard-edged handsomeness modeling agencies coveted.

The vacuum cleaner roared to life, in the back corner of the dining room by the sound of it.

Tad broke the semisilence. "I'm not in love with Nancy, and she's not in love with me. That doesn't mean I don't care about her." He leaned forward, his arms on the front edge of the desk, his blue gaze intense. "This guy doesn't feel right, Cass."

"Still sounds like jealousy." It wasn't a statement you could make to just anyone.

He nodded. "I know. And that's what I told myself. But I can't shake the feeling that something's wrong. She brought him here for lunch today. She didn't know you wouldn't be here. When she mentioned that you used to be a cop, he nearly had apoplexy."

"Apoplexy?"

"Okay, I'm exaggerating. But there was a definite reaction."

"The word 'cop' makes some people naturally nervous."

"Is that a no?"

I studied the face, the sincerity, the underlying entreaty, and thought about what I owed him, a debt that appeared only on my personal ledger, not his.

With a sigh, I pulled a notepad toward me. "What do you know about him?"

Nikes tied, I stood and retrieved my shoulder bag from the closet. That conversation had been three days ago, and while, given the constraints on my time, I had covered a lot of ground, I felt as if I'd never passed Go, much less collected two hundred dollars.

When I'd been on the force, that kind of background check with those kinds of results usually meant one of two things—the subject was an average person with the kind of nondescript life most people live, or the subject had a lot to

hide and had done one damn fine job of doing just that.

I hoped, for the sake of all concerned, that Edward Charles North fit into the former category. But I kept hearing that distant warning jangle.

**A**t one time Sunset Beach was an entity unto itself, separated from the city by ten miles of two-lane highway and unobstructed views of the Gulf. Now the highway was four lanes that groaned under the crush of winter tourists, glimpses of the Gulf between condos and time shares and hotels were rare, and the only thing separating Sunset Beach from the city was a sign and an imaginary line.

The community struggled to maintain its small town atmosphere and was successful most of the year. The influx of snowbirds after Christmas put serious strains on that attempt.

You could already tell a difference in the traffic. Northerners and Canadians who had no reason to brave the winter before Christmas. But with the new year would come the mother of all perpetual traffic jams, and permanent residents would grit their teeth and bear it, wondering, as they did every

year, if the extra money in the till was worth it.

I was grateful it wasn't January. Single-person surveillance was no piece of cake under the best of conditions. It would have been an impossibility in the midst of the snowbirds. I had parked—another impossibility during tourist season—across from the jewelry store where Edward North worked and crossed the street to window shop. I was careful to keep my head down, even though clerks in jewelry stores are so accustomed to window shoppers they barely take notice.

Once I spotted Edward waiting on a customer, I returned to the Camaro and settled in. To occupy myself, I mentally recapped what I had so far. He lived in a modest but nice apartment in a small complex that was maintained and managed by a rental agency. According to them, Mr. North was a model tenant, which meant he paid his rent on time, caused no problems, and probably never complained to management. He'd lived there just over two years.

Under the same guise of conducting a routine credit check, I had called the jewelry store manager. In the two years he had worked there, North had

become a valued and trusted employee.

Two seemed to be the magic number. After a search of county records turned up no birth certificate, no divorce proceedings, no property transfers, I had contacted a friend in the right place who was able to tell me that North's Florida driver's license was only two years old. A credit check revealed that he had two department store credit cards, both two years old and a two-year-old Master Card.

Now, when you move to a new state, you need a new driver's license and new credit cards for new department stores. But your Master Card doesn't care where you live. It goes with you everywhere, just like your cat or your underwear.

Even the car he drove, a late model Pontiac Grand Am, had been bought two years ago at a local used car lot. According to the owner, North had paid cash for a barely driven car. The owner had been willing to dicker, but North hadn't quibbled with the asking price. Made a man feel almost guilty. But, hey, you give the customer what he wants.

Everything was such a neat, two-year-old package. Life's not that neat. Of course, it was

entirely possible that Edward Charles North was simply, for any number of very legitimate reasons, starting a new life.

Yeah, and this year Michigan residents are all going to decide to spend the winter at home.

The front door of the jewelry store opened, and North came out. He was tall, slim, blond, and well-dressed. Hand going to his trousers pocket, he entered the dead-end alleyway next to the store. In a few moments, his Grand Am pulled to the street and made a left. I followed.

He drove three blocks, made a right, drove another block and then turned left into a small parking lot next to an Italian restaurant. On the diagonally opposite corner sat a florist's shop with cramped, off-street parking for customers only on two sides of the building. I squeezed the Camaro in on the side of the shop with no windows, climbed out, and used the distance and other parked cars as camouflage.

North was coming around the corner of the restaurant. A tall woman in a deep red suit stood in front of the door. They spoke for about a minute and then went inside.

I gave them time to get seated and settled and then followed. It was a small restau-

rant, basically one large room that had been divided with platforms and low screens to give the illusion of size. Most of the customers were retirees whose daily routine usually included a late breakfast, a combined lunch and dinner somewhere between four or five in the afternoon, and an evening of TV or bingo.

"Table for one?" the hostess asked with a smile.

"I know this is terribly tacky, but I really need to use your restroom." I managed to look apologetic and pained at the same time.

Her smile never wavered. "No problem. Straight back on your left."

"Thanks."

While talking to the hostess, I had already scouted the tables closest to the door. As I made my way toward the restrooms, I let my eyes sweep the rest of the room. No sign of North's blond head. Pretending to scratch my nose, I did a slower scan. Nothing.

I stopped a server with a tray of empties held at shoulder level. "Excuse me, but did a blond-headed man and a woman in a cranberry colored suit just come in here?"

"Yeah, came and left. Yolanda seated them and then they got up and went into the kitchen." Marni, according to

her nametag, rolled her eyes. "You should have heard Rodolfo scream."

"Are they still in the kitchen?"

"Nah. They left through the back door. You know, there are days when it pays not to speak Italian." Shaking her head, Marni continued toward the kitchen.

I hurried back to the front of the restaurant, smiled and thanked the hostess. Once outside I dashed around to the parking lot. The Grand Am was still there. No visible exit from the restaurant. I jogged back around to the front of the restaurant and down the sidewalk to the rear where I found a side emergency exit—the kind that opens to the tune of bells and sirens—and the exit from the kitchen that opened onto an area for delivery trucks.

Damn and double damn! Now what, hotshot?

I contemplated my options and returned to the restaurant.

The hostess's eyes widened. "Hello again."

"Hi. My friend is going to be delayed, so I thought I might pass the time with some cheesecake."

She beamed, certain that her hospitality was responsible for my return. "Cheesecake is a wonderful way to pass the

time." She headed toward the right side of the room.

I pointed to the left. "Could I sit over there?"

"Of course."

Once I was seated, Marni appeared with a bright smile and a menu.

"Hey there. Did you catch up with your friends?"

"No." I handed back the menu. "I'll have a cup of hot tea and a slice of cheesecake."

"You want it plain or with strawberries, blueberries, cherries, pineapple, or chocolate on top?"

"Let's live dangerously and go with the chocolate."

While I waited for my order, I studied the restaurant. The busboy cleaned off the next table, surreptitiously flicking the crumbs onto the carpet, something I was constantly preaching about. They used fancy paper placemats, cheaper than tablecloths but not as nice. The tables were too close together for my taste.

"Here you are," Marni said. "Be back in a sec."

She hurried two tables over and cajoled an elderly foursome into splitting two desserts. By the time she returned with two slices of cheesecake topped with blueberries, four clean forks, and four cups of coffee, I was halfway finished with mine. It was rich and smooth,

and the drizzle of chocolate over the top added just enough extra flavor.

"How's the cheesecake?" Her smile was still bright.

"Excellent."

"You from Kentucky?" She pointed to my sweatshirt.

"Originally."

"I'm from Tennessee."

I saw the dare in her eyes. "I bet you attended the University of Tennessee."

Marni grinned. "My blood used to run orange. UK and Tennessee sure know how to give their fans their money's worth. These people down here have no idea what real basketball is."

"Tell me about it." I smiled back. "How long have you worked here?"

"A year or so. I teach low impact aerobics in the mornings."

"I guess you get a lot of regulars."

She nodded. "We have summer regulars and winter regulars."

"What about the couple I asked about earlier?"

She shook her head. "I've never seen her before. I've seen him, though. Last week he pulled the same trick with a man. In one door, out the other."

"Rather strange behavior."

She shrugged. "Yolanda doesn't seem to mind. I think

maybe she knows him. He comes in every once in a while with some uptight dude, and she always waits on them herself."

"Yolanda?"

"The hostess. Yolanda Cuomo. She and her husband own this place."

After finishing my cheesecake and my conversation with Marni, I left the restaurant, checked the parking lot—the Grand Am was still there—and returned to the Camaro. I decided to stay right where I was—well, maybe not *right* where I was; I was beginning to feel guilty—and wait for North to return. When the brunette in the cranberry suit dropped him off, I'd follow her, see what I could find out before I had to get back for the busiest part of the dinner hour.

I checked my watch and did some mental calculations about hypothetical situations and how much time they would take. Then I entered the florist shop, bought a small silk flower arrangement for the hostess stand at Dillon's, and wired some flowers to my parents. The shop was arranged so that I had no trouble keeping a lookout.

As I was unlocking the Camaro, the Grand Am pulled to the street. Damn! Where was



the brunette? Traffic forced the Grand Am to wait and gave me time to make my flower arrangement secure behind the driver's seat and get the Camaro started.

When he left the parking lot, he hadn't turned as if he were going to retrace his route to the jewelry store. Whatever was going on, I was along for the ride.

And after fifteen minutes, I was beginning to think I was being taken for a ride. North's meanderings seemed as random as summer thunderstorms. I could hardly think of one explanation—he suspected he was being followed and was trying to identify me or make me lose interest.

Suddenly another option made me take a quick look in my rear view mirror. North suspected he was being followed and was using the circuitous route to give someone else time to identify me. The brunette maybe?

I tried to remember what other cars had been around the restaurant. I kept checking both rear view mirrors, trying to spot a tail. Following North was no problem. He signaled every turn. Definitely not the action of a man trying to shake a tail.

I decided enough was enough. This added a new

wrinkle, one I didn't much care for, and I needed time to sort it out.

North signaled a right turn. I pulled into the left turn lane and waited for the light to change, resisting the almost magnetic pull on the right side of my head.

All the way back to Dillon's I kept half my attention on what was behind me.

And wondered what the hell I was going to tell Tad.

“What do you mean you lost them? You're supposed to be good at this!” Tad paced in front of my desk. If four steps one way and four steps back could legitimately be called pacing.

“Hey, I'm rusty. What can I say?”

He stopped. “This is no time to be flip, Cass.”

“And this is no time to lose your cool,” I reminded him gently.

He sighed and ran long, slim fingers through his blond hair. Edward North had blond hair, shorter than Tad's but just as blond. Probably had blue eyes, too. I idly wondered about the physical similarities between the two men, remembered that my cousin's second husband

could easily pass for her first husband's brother.

Tad abruptly sat down. "So when is it time?"

"When we have something worth losing your cool over. This could be totally innocent. She might very well be a real estate agent. Maybe he's planning to surprise Nancy with a house."

"Where do we go from here?"

"You go check on the bar and the kitchen while I change clothes. Then I'll check in with the new hostess before making my rounds of the dining room. Hopefully, business will be better than it was at lunch." I headed off his protest. "We have a restaurant to run. I have a couple of leads, but I can't do anything until morning."

"You're not holding out on me, are you, pal?"

I met his gaze steadfastly. "When I know something, you'll know something."

He nodded and pushed out of the chair. "See you in a few."

I contemplated the door he closed on the way out. My years on the force had brought me into contact with any number of world class liars. I had had the best as my teachers.

It was scary to think about how easily we can slip back into old habits.

\*

I would have put the woman in cranberry down as an extra girlfriend had it not been for the speedy exit through the kitchen, the fact that it was not the first such exit, the semi-regular meetings with an "uptight" man, and one other piece of information Marni had supplied.

Someone else had been asking questions about Edward North. "Really cold," Marni had said. "Super polite and smiling, but cold."

I had left the closing and cleanup to Tad and had driven to North's apartment. At eleven P.M. he walked Nancy to her car where they exchanged a goodnight kiss. North had stood and watched until her car rounded the corner before he returned to his apartment. The lights stayed on until twelve thirty. I gave it another forty-five minutes before calling it a night.

Back bright and early at six thirty A.M., I intended to spend the day with Mr. North and his life. At seven he came out in sweatpants and sweatshirt, did a few waist twists and arm circles, and headed down the street at a slow trot. Keeping my eyes on his progress, I grabbed the two white paper bags from the front seat, the thermos of orange juice, and a sketchpad and pencil case from

the back seat and climbed out of Tad's Prelude. He had only raised an eyebrow when, before I left the restaurant in his capable hands, I had asked to switch cars with him for twenty-four hours.

One of the many things an exuberant and in-love Nancy had told Tad about her fiancé was that he jogged every day. Weekends he went for long runs, ten miles or more. Weekdays he used the jogging path in the park a block from his apartment. Ideally, the best surveillance would have consisted of using the trail myself, since no matter where I was positioned there would be times when North would be out of my sight. But a bullet wound had forced me to switch from jogging to fitness walking.

I had to settle for a surveillance ruse I had used more than once on the force. I chose a picnic table with the most complete view of the park and set myself up as an artist making rough sketches. Sketching offers the perfect excuse for frequently studying the surroundings. My talent is limited to landscapes, but I do them well enough to draw favorable comments from congenial passersby.

The morning was cool, the last traces of the Canadian cold front lingering in the air. But

my spot was sunny and warm, and I enjoyed the last of my Egg McMuffin and half a doughnut while I flipped through the sketchpad and kept an eye on North. I timed his first lap so I could check for significant variations that might indicate he'd stopped to talk to someone.

North was on his third lap before I noticed the guy trailing him by several yards. Not that I thought North and I should have the park to ourselves. But there was something not quite right. Midway through the fourth lap I realized what it was. The second jogger had neither gained nor lost ground on North.

No two jogging paces are exactly alike. When people jog together, someone has to adjust his pace, and even then you'll never see them in step with each other. And solitary joggers "play games" with other solitary joggers, just as the Northerners who drive down I-75 to Florida find themselves, at various times, passing, falling behind, repassing the same vehicle until one or the other catches a break in traffic or pulls into a rest area.

Then North did what a lot of experienced joggers using the same loop often do during the last half of a workout—he changed directions. The trailing jogger looked as though

he'd been shot. He regained his composure enough to exchange nods and a passing greeting with North, then seemed at a loss. He looked around as if for advice before continuing in the direction he'd been going.

Folding to a clean page, I searched the park and as much of the street as I could see. I stood and pretended to stretch out the kinks before pouring juice from the thermos and sipping it slowly while I gave the area behind me a good look.

A couple of cars looked suspicious. A woman pushed a stroller briskly along the sidewalk encircling the park. I hadn't noticed her before. Two elderly men had set up a chess game atop a sunny picnic table.

I sat back down and continued sketching, keeping as close an eye on the second jogger as I did North. North walked a lap, then, sweatshirt sleeves pushed to his elbows, began doing stretches, starting with lunges.

I considered collecting my stuff and leaving ahead of him, but the second jogger, now also stretching just out of North's line of sight, made me nervous.

So I stayed. And watched North, wiping his forehead on his sleeve, walk back to his apartment. And watched jogger number two watch North and then climb into a white sedan.

I looked over my shoulder. The chess game was still in progress. No sign of mother with stroller.

I gathered my things together, canned my trash, and started back to Tad's car. Ahead, I could see North. The white sedan still had not pulled away from the curb.

North had disappeared into his apartment by the time I was back in Tad's car. I tossed everything on the passenger seat and scrunched down in the driver's seat. Still no white sedan. Maybe I'd overreacted.

Shortly after eight thirty North came out, in a suit, climbed into the Grand Am, and drove off in the direction I would have expected him to take to get to the jewelry store. I waited. The white sedan came around the corner and followed him. I scrunched down lower, but not before I saw two people in the car, a man and a woman.

I waited two more minutes to see if anyone else would join the parade before U-turning and following. If I'd known exactly what was going on, the situation would have been comical. Confusion tends to dampen humor.

North pulled into the employee parking area. The white sedan parked on the street about half a block shy of the jewelry store. I drove past them

both to park on the same side of the street three spaces beyond the store. I adjusted the rear view mirrors and flipped down the visor to use the vanity mirror to keep an eye on what went on behind me.

It was like watching a silent movie. I tuned out all the street sounds and concentrated on monitoring the mirrors. North appeared on the sidewalk, checked his watch, then headed back toward the white sedan. It wasn't until he entered, without incident, the bakery/delicatessen the sedan had parked in front of that I realized I'd been holding my breath.

Here I was following a guy I suspected of being involved in something illegal or at least immoral, and I was suddenly very protective of him. Maybe it was just the normal surveillance possessiveness—I was following him first; go find someone else to follow—or maybe it was because the pair in the sedan had averted their faces when North neared their position or because I was fairly certain the woman in the car was the same woman who had been pushing the stroller. No wonder that baby was so good. Dollies generally do everything you tell them to do.

Fifteen minutes passed. North came out with a white paper bag and a paper cup,

probably coffee from the way he was handling it. When he reached the jewelry store, another man was unlocking the door. They laughed about something and entered, North holding the door for the older man.

Even though I originally had other plans for the morning, I waited to see what the white sedan did. Twenty minutes passed. The car's occupants had an animated conversation. Then the car pulled away from the curb, passed me, turned right at the corner.

It took me about two seconds to make a decision. I followed them to a restaurant that boasted The Breakfast Bar to End All Breakfast Bars. As much as I wanted to find out more about who else was following North, I had things to do that could only be done while I was certain he was at work. With a sigh, I left them to their breakfast orgy.

I was back at the jewelry store by ten fifty. I had to circle the block a couple of times before I was able to snag a parking spot on the street. It didn't offer the best possible view, but if I slid down somewhat in the seat and adjusted the outside rear view mirror, I could keep an eye on the store's front door. No sign of

the duo from the park or their white sedan.

Some of North's neighbors had confirmed my suspicions that he was a man with something to hide. The people I talked to liked him, considered him a good neighbor and a good person, someone they felt they could call on in an emergency. They liked Nancy, too, thought she and Edward made a good couple.

But no one knew anything about Edward's past. They weren't even sure where he had lived before coming to Sunset Beach. He never talked about family other than to say that he had some distant cousins and a great-aunt he hadn't seen in years.

In the rear view mirror, a slightly canted Nancy, auburn tresses gleaming in the morning sun, crossed the street and entered the jewelry store. In a few minutes, she and North came out and, arm in arm, started down the street toward me. At that moment, sitting in Tad's car didn't seem like such a smart idea, even if they were on the other side of the street.

Knowing that movement attracts attention, I sat very still. Nancy was too busy telling North something to notice anything or anyone else. He glanced my way, seemed to be casually searching the street

without alerting his companion. I followed their progress to the corner, where they crossed to my side of the street. Instead of turning toward me, they continued straight, disappearing from my sight behind a dress shop.

I knew where they were headed. A little cafe owned by a friend of mine and open only from eleven A.M. to six P.M. It was a favorite lunch haunt of area shoppers and employees.

The memory of North searching the street over Nancy's auburn head replayed, replayed, intermixed with scenes of the morning jogger's startled face and the white sedan with two passengers.

North in trouble was one thing. But taking Nancy into it was something entirely different. I grabbed my purse and quit the Prelude. Making a pretense of being sure I had my keys and shutting and checking the door, I searched the length of the street myself. No white sedan. But they had known where North would be this morning. They could very well know where and when he ate lunch. Slinging the purse over my shoulder, I started toward the corner at a brisk pace.

They were waiting when I turned the corner. Three men in suits, their faces threateningly devoid of expression. The

gray Lincoln at the curb was undoubtedly theirs.

I stopped dead in my Nikes, my right hand resting on the top of my purse. Two of them I could probably handle long enough to dart into one of the shops. Three was another story. And there could be a fourth behind the wheel of the Lincoln. Every muscle in my body threatened to twitch.

"Ms. Dillon, we'd like you to come with us." The one with the mustache and the nineteen inch neck had a voice that sounded as if it came from the depths of the Grand Canyon.

"Maybe some other time, fellas." I slipped my hand inside my purse and curled my fingers around the grip of the Ruger P85. With my left hand, I pointed toward the wiry dark-haired one trying a flanking move. "You can just stop right there, buddy."

Cars whizzed past. Somewhere I could hear the sound of lively conversation. But on this corner, not one damn pedestrian. It was the middle of the day, for Pete's sake!

The wiry one stopped. His hand slid casually inside his open jacket and stayed there. Grand Canyon spoke again.

"I can assure you, Ms. Dillon, that you'll be perfectly safe with us."

His hand went inside his jacket. I pushed down the Ruger's slide-mounted safety. Every muscle in my body tensed for fight or flight, whichever when the moment came seemed most prudent.

His hand came out holding a wallet-sized leather folder which he flipped open and held by the top edge so that I could see. "Federal agents."

"I know of two theatrical supply stores in the area where anyone can buy one of those."

"Markins. Show Ms. Dillon your I.D."

The wiry one withdrew his I.D. and, leaning slightly forward, held it at arm's length toward me. I stretched my left arm and took it. Picture I.D. on one side. Badge on the other. I tossed it back.

"You guys better have a good explanation for this."

**H**e perched on the front edge of his desk. "You're a private citizen now, Dillon. How did you get a permit to carry this thing?" He indicated the Ruger lying atop his desk alongside my purse.

I relaxed into the chair. "Santa Claus."

He snorted and nodded his head once. "I guess your captain thought someone might decide they needed to finish



what they started. What's it been? Two years?"

Inwardly, I flinched at the sharp echoes of gunfire, recoiled from the stench in the air—ocean, ozone, garbage, cordite, blood. Outwardly, it was just another day in the local office at the Justice Department. "A little over two."

He shrugged. "They've probably lost interest by now. I like your hair long like that. You still have that memory gap?"

Someone yelled, screamed. Me or Vinnie? Still the echo of gunfire. I shoved that memory away. "Can we cut the chitchat crap, Pacheco? You never were very good at it."

Guy Pacheco was with the Justice Department. Our paths had crossed a few times in the course of investigations that had peripherally touched. He was an okay guy. As federal agents went.

He smiled. When his green eyes crinkled at the corners, the jagged scar at the edge of his left eye almost disappeared. "You always were a bottom line kind of person, Dillon. Nice to know some things don't change." His face sobered. The change made him look every year of his forty-five. "We need you to drop your investigation of Edward North."

"One of yours?"

I could have played cutesy, pulled the I-don't-know-what-you're-talking-about routine. And I might have under other circumstances. But we were alone, and Pacheco had always played pretty straight with me.

He nodded.

I added it up. "Two-year-old credit cards. Two-year-old driver's license. Is that how long he's been in the program, or did you have to move him from somewhere else?"

Pacheco shook his head. "It's been a long time since we had to move anybody."

"So what's the deal?"

"All I can tell you is that he's not a bad guy and he's scheduled to testify next month." His jawline hardened until he reminded me of a Marlboro man. "It's a big one, Cass. The culmination of five years' work and two agents' lives."

It was my turn to nod. "Where's he testifying?"

Pacheco lowered his chin and raised his eyebrows.

I waved the air. "Forget I asked. What about afterward? Will you be moving him again?"

"Shouldn't be any reason to. He's secure here. And he's getting married. As you well know."

"Does Nancy know he's a federally protected witness?"

"We advised him not to tell her, at least not until after the trial, but he's in love." Pacheco shrugged, both palms facing the ceiling. "People in love don't always act in their own best interest."

"How did you catch on to me?"

"Your two inquiries. We're automatically notified whenever his credit rating is checked."

"But I didn't use my real name."

His smile held a hint of self-satisfied mischief. "We did a thorough check on his fiancée when we realized he was getting serious. Turned up an old boyfriend who happens to be co-owner of a restaurant with an ex-cop."

"So you sent two guys to the restaurant."

He grinned. "Thanks for not blowing their cover."

"Cover?" I snorted. "You guys think a raincoat is cover."

Pacheco laughed. "The decision to send them came from higher up. I warned them you'd spot an agent in a minute."

"The thing at the restaurant yesterday?"

"We needed to make sure it was you following him and not someone else. The owner is a retired marshal."

"You could have just asked."

"If I'd had my way, that's exactly what I would have done." He became serious again. "About this old boyfriend."

"He won't be a problem."

"How much will you have to tell him?"

"Don't worry. I trust Tad completely."

"That's good enough for me, but I don't think I'll put it in my report."

"So don't. Can I have my purse back now?"

"Be my guest." He stood up.

I checked the gun, to his amusement, and put it in the purse. "My car?"

"Skitterman has your keys. She'll take you down to the garage."

I had guessed right. There had been a wheelman—wheel-woman—wheelperson—whatever. Skitterman was my lady in cranberry, only today she wore a nice, sedate navy blue.

I paused at the door. "Don't you think three was overkill?"

He grinned. "I was protecting my agents. I knew two wouldn't stand a chance with you."

"Get real, Pacheco."

I left him chuckling.

I stood where I could be out of the way while keeping an eye on the dining room and the bar. Not that I needed to. Business was good. The staff seemed to be having

no problem covering for their sick co-workers. The customers were happy. Everything was running smoothly, even routinely. Mentally I sighed. Which was more than I could say for the rest of my day.

On my way back from the city and my meeting with Pacheco, I had almost given in to the urge to return to the alley where my career as a cop had ended, had angrily turned away two blocks from where I'd come close to the same death that had reached out its cold fingers to snatch my partner from the world.

Instead, I had fought my way home, changed clothes, and pushed myself through six miles of fitness walking. I usually only do five. The extra mile had been self-imposed punishment for allowing myself to get caught up in a way of life I had fought hard to put behind me. I couldn't be angry with Tad for asking for help, but I could be angry with myself for enjoying the chase.

Juan passed me with a wink, a tray of dirty dishes held shoulder high. He was singing softly in Spanish what I recognized as a Gloria Estefan song.

The workout had exorcised my personal frustrations so that I had been ready to deal with Tad's when I told him the truth about Edward North. It

had made for some tense moments.

"Pretty good business tonight," Tad said from behind me.

"Lucky for us this flu thing hit before the snowbirds arrived."

"We would have managed."

I studied his profile. "How are you doing?"

"I'll live." He turned toward me and smiled softly. "Sorry I freaked out on you like that."

"One apology is more than enough."

"You're sure she's safe?"

"I'm sure."

Guy Pacheco was good at his job. I had heard the stifled emotion in his voice when he spoke of the dead agents and knew that, for him, Edward North's safety had taken on an extra importance.

"You were right, you know," Tad said quietly. "About the jealousy."

I slid my arm around his waist. "Happens to the best of us."

His jaw worked. "She'll go if they have to relocate him."

I studied his face. "Are you okay with that?"

"No. But it's not my decision to make." He put his arm around my shoulders. "Promise you won't let me do anything stupid if it comes to that."

"If you'll promise to kick my butt if I even think about doing another favor for a friend."

He laughed and gave me a one-arm hug. "It's in your blood, Dillon. You can't run forever."

"I don't have to run. I just have to walk briskly."

He laughed again.

The new hostess came up behind us with an obviously exasperated man in tow. "Mr. Bandowski is having car trouble. I told him we'd be glad to offer him a cup of coffee while he waits for help."

Tad's handsome face broke into a big grin. "We can do better than that. I happen to know where there's an extra piece of apple pie."

The man's exasperation started to melt under Tad's warm friendliness. "I should have known the deal was too good to be true. Next time I'll stick with Hertz."

"Ah, the perils of rental cars." Tad shook his head in sympathy. "Let's go look for that pie."

The man looked suspicious. "How does your boss feel about you giving away free pie and coffee?"

Tad's grin broadened. "I *am* the boss."

I cleared my throat.

"Well, one of them," he amended, taking the man's

arm and steering him toward the bar. "Do you want ice cream or whipped cream on your pie?"

The hostess and I exchanged grins. By the time help arrived, Tad would have the man—

Rental car.

Those mental warning bells began clanging hysterically. The man and woman in the white sedan. My heartbeat quickened. My skin tingled. The white sedan had been a rental. Feds didn't use rentals. And they had averted their faces when North walked toward them. Pacheco's men would have wanted to reassure him with their presence.

What was it Pacheco had said. My *two* inquiries? I had checked North's credit rating once.

Someone else had tripped the alarm.

Hell!

I pushed the Camaro through traffic lights and around corners. When I reached the park where North jogged, I made a slow turn onto the street where he lived, searching for the white sedan or any other suspicious vehicle. Nothing. I made a pass around the block, canvassing every car. Same result. Nothing. No white sedan. No suspi-

cious vehicle. And no Grand Am.

I cruised past the apartment complex again, the empty slot where I'd seen the Grand Am parked that morning yawning in my face. Possibilities?

North could have parked his car elsewhere. But people are creatures of habit. He and Nancy could have gone out for the evening. In which case they'd be returning when? Or they could be spending a quiet evening at Nancy's house.

I decided on that option partly because action was preferable to inaction and partly because I didn't want to consider the distinct possibility that they'd already snatched North, had taken him and the Grand Am to set up a phony but fatal accident.

I reached the neighborhood where Nancy lived in under ten minutes and repeated my surveillance sweep. North's car was parked in the driveway that ran along the left side of the house. Having been there several times when Tad and Nancy were dating, I knew the driveway led to a detached garage in the back yard.

The other cars, both of them black, were parked on opposite ends of the street. The man on the east end didn't bother to duck; the man on the west end didn't duck quite fast enough.

I made a right at the corner, parked the Camaro in the middle of the block, and tried to envision the neighborhood in daylight. With the darkness as an ally, I was confident I could reach Nancy's back door undetected. The tailored black skirt, ice blue silk blouse, and low heels weren't what I would have chosen for the occasion, but I hadn't been given an option. I had hesitated at the restaurant only long enough to make one phone call and tell the hostess to inform Tad I'd be back for closing.

I reached into the back seat for the zip-front hooded sweatshirt I kept there to wipe fogged windows. It was ratty, paint-stained, and unfashionable, but it had one redeeming quality. It was navy blue.

I shrugged into it and zipped it up. Then I put my car keys in my skirt pocket and pulled the Ruger from my purse, old habit making me check the fifteen-round clip. Standing on the sidewalk, I took a minute to listen to the neighborhood's sounds. A breeze blew in off the Gulf, pushing my hair gently across my face and carrying a warm, salty scent.

The best way, the way that was least likely to call attention to myself, was to use the sidewalk as much as possible. I headed for the street parallel-

ing Nancy's back yard. The key was not to skulk, but to act as if I belonged. I put my right hand and the Ruger into the jacket pocket.

I turned the corner slowly, letting my eyes search the street. I didn't break stride, but I didn't move too briskly, not wanting to reach the middle of the block before being sure I was the only person who didn't belong.

The street was quiet. Drapes were drawn. Once I got a glimpse of the bluewhite glow of a television. No traffic. No barking dogs. Just the breeze whispering in the palm fronds and the quiet click of my heels.

The front of the house whose back yard abutted Nancy's was dark. I stepped into the grass, or the springy, plastic stuff Floridians call grass, and moved quickly toward the rear of the house. The hibiscus hedge shielded me from the neighbor's view. I paused when I drew even with the back of the house for two reasons.

One, light streamed from windows. Two, since I'd last been to Nancy's, the neighbors had erected a six foot fence between the two back yards. Damn!

One bright window became an eyeless hole. A few seconds later, floorlength curtains swished across french doors,

leaving only a tiny crack of lamplight.

I checked to make sure I had the correct yard. The roof of Nancy's garage disappeared into the poinciana tree in the back corner of the yard of the house on my right.

Listening intently to the night, I crept to the fence. I studied it, trying to decide how quiet I could be trying to get over it in a skirt. A bump and a metallic clatter froze me. The noises had come from the garage.

I concentrated. A prowling raccoon? A neighbor's cat?

Then a voice, a husky rumble. "How much longer?"

A scratchy noise I recognized as a walkie-talkie. "He should be here in half an hour."

I didn't catch the rest, had no idea who "he" was, but two things were certain. There were three of them—must have been a day for threes—and they were expecting a fourth. At the most I had half an hour. At the least—

I returned to the Camaro, covering the same ground in half the time. I had a plan in mind by the time I started the engine.

I sped to the convenience store two blocks away and raced a teenager for the phone. I had to think for a minute before I could punch in the num-

ber, prayed she hadn't changed it. She picked up in the middle of the second ring.

"Hello?"

"Nancy, this is Cass Dillon. I want you to listen and do exactly as I say. Don't ask questions. Make sure all your doors are locked. Turn on the lamp that sits in your front window. Then and only then turn out all the other lights in your house. In about five minutes, I'm going to pull into your driveway. As I do, I'll honk three times. Unlock your front door and stand back out of the way. Do you understand?"

Silence hissed in my ear.

"Nancy! Do you understand?"

"Yes." Her voice was shaky. "We'll be ready."

"We should just give them what they want." Edward North's voice was an ambiguous mixture of resignation and defiance.

From my position at the window, I looked over my shoulder to the corner of the darkened sewing room where I had put Edward and Nancy. She had grabbed his arm and was shaking him.

"No, Edward," she whispered.

"It won't work, Edward," I said. "Leaving witnesses is not

their style. We'll just sit tight until Pacheco comes. Agreed?"

"What if they won't wait?"

"Can't cross bridges before you get to them. We wait for Pacheco."

"We wait for Pacheco," Nancy said with conviction.

North didn't answer immediately. I could only guess what was going through his mind.

"You've come this far with Pacheco," I pointed out. "There's no reason to give up on him now."

He nodded, but I wondered if he might have third or fourth thoughts about testifying. I turned back to the window with the view of the street. That was Pacheco's problem, not mine.

My problem was this box we were in and a half hour that was quickly running out and a Justice Department nowhere to be seen.

My phone call from the restaurant had been to Pacheco's office. Gone for the day. Skitterman? Gone for the day. Where can Pacheco be reached? We can't give out that information.

Dammit it all to hell and back!

"Listen, buster." I had just managed not to yell. "You find him and you find him fast. Tell him Dillon called and what we discussed this afternoon isn't a secret any more."



I surveyed what I could see of the street. Okay, Pacheco. Haul your buns and guns over here.

I had counted on surprise and a dash of confusion to facilitate my entry into the house and keep the bad guys in their places. My original intent had been to make a mad dash for Nancy's front door, but I had decided that might precipitate preemptive action. Better to act as if I belonged and give Pacheco a chance to arrive with the cavalry before I tried something on my own.

And at the present, "my own" wasn't all that appealing. The best I'd been able to come up with were jerry-built alarms at the back entrances and a rear corner window that might offer a chance to get into the neighbor's back yard. But I had no way of knowing if my friend in the garage was still there or if my arrival had prompted his friends to suggest he patrol the yard.

"How much longer?" Nancy asked.

I cupped my hand over the flashlight I'd found in a kitchen drawer and snapped it on to check my watch. I clicked it off quickly.

"Three more minutes."

She nodded. I had already discussed my escape option with them. We all knew it was a long shot, but long shots are

better than no shots. I didn't want the half hour to run out completely before we made our move.

The subtle change in the tenor of the street jerked my head back to the window. It took several seconds to realize the street light on the east end of the street had gone dark:

Damn! I'd waited too long. They were making their move.

I checked the Ruger, chambered a round. The sound bounced around the dark room. I considered abandoning the flashlight, hefted it, then decided to give it to North.

The street went almost totally black as the street light on the west end went dead. My heart pounded.

"Oh my God," Nancy breathed.

Stooped over, I crossed to them. I shoved the flashlight into North's hand. "Use this as a club. Aim for the nose. I want you two in that back bedroom, ready to go. If hell breaks loose, don't wait for me. Get out. You know what to do."

"What about you?" North wanted to know, his voice steady.

"Don't worry. I only want to confuse them. Then I'll be right on your tail. Now move."

I pushed at them and they obeyed, scurrying out of the sewing room and across the

hall. Taking a deep breath, I traversed the short hall in the opposite direction, stopping in the pale wash of light spilling from the living room to reach up to the bank of switches and kill the light. While I waited for my night vision to return, I listened, trying to ignore the pounding in my chest and the low roar in my ears.

Once everything in the room started to take on its original shape, I moved cautiously to the kitchen. I duck-walked across the tile floor to the door and slid up the wall beside it so I could peer out. In the shadows around the garage there was movement.

I waited. Then a figure crept across the yard, a dark shape against the fence.

Someone stepped onto the front porch. My head swung in that direction. It was now or forget trying to get out with Edward and Nancy. I had a straight line of sight from my position to the front window. I'd put three or four rounds through the window, move quickly to the window over the sink and put three or four more rounds through it into the back yard, then sprint for the bedroom, and hope that Edward and Nancy would already be through the window.

I inhaled deeply, puffed the breath out, inhaled deeply, puffed the breath out and—

“Hey, Marshal Dillon! The cavalry has arrived.”

By the time I reached the front door, my knees felt like jelly. I pulled aside the armchair, undid the locks, and opened the door inward. A rifle was pointed at me over Pacheco's shoulder.

“Cut the marshal crap,” I snapped. “You ever hear of calling ahead?”

The shooter, wearing a baseball-style cap, lowered the gun. Both he and Pacheco were wearing Kevlar.

Pacheco grinned. “I just took a chance you'd be home. Got any coffee?”

I took the chair across from him. It was three in the afternoon, and only one other table was occupied, by a couple with a month-old baby. “Karen said a ‘gentleman’ at table six wanted to see me.”

Pacheco grinned, wiped his mouth with the linen napkin, and returned it to his lap. “Her mistake.” There were shadows under his green eyes. “How's your partner doing?”

“He's had about the same amount of sleep you've had in the last five days.”

I hadn't done much better. The old nightmares had returned for two nights. My sleep since then had been uneasy in anxious anticipation of their

ugliness. If Pacheco noticed, he scored points by not mentioning it.

He drew an envelope from an inside pocket and handed it across the table to me. "Nancy asked me to see that he got this."

She had swept his name across the face of the envelope. Just one word—Tad—nothing more. I laid the envelope down, the name pressed against the linen tablecloth. "How often do you play mailman?"

"Not very." He indicated the envelope. "There won't be any more of those."

"He wasn't expecting this one."

I had warned Tad that if Nancy made the decision to go with North, it would have to be an immediate one. The U.S. marshals would move quickly and quietly. As they had that night. Shooting out the street lights with silenced weapons and moving with swift stealth to take, first, the men in the cars and, second, the man in Nancy's garage. No one in the neighborhood had been any the wiser. A case of ignorance truly being bliss.

Pacheco finished off a french fry. "You handled the situation very well the other night."

"I thought I was *persona non grata*."

I had been "debriefed" by Pacheco's superiors, which meant that I had been asked the same questions about what I knew, how I found North, why I was looking for him in the first place, what I did that night at least twenty times. Pacheco had been there most of the time, adopting and maintaining an impassive demeanor that managed to communicate disapproval. In other words, standard Federal operating procedure.

He grinned again. "Officially, you're still a fly sitting in their pancake syrup. Unofficially, you probably saved North's life. He and Nancy had been considering going out to a late movie. If they'd left the house before we got there—"

He let the words dangle, but we both knew what the consequences would have been. After our conversation that afternoon, he had done some re-checking of his own, mainly because he kept wondering why I would have run *two* credit checks. What he learned from that had sent him back to the restaurant owned by the retired marshal and a chat with my new friend Marni. He and I had put two and two together about the same time.

"I don't suppose you've been able to get anything from those three guys," I said.

"Just their fingerprints." He rested his forearms against the edge of the table. "And the fact that your arrival and that trick with the lights threw them totally off guard. Bought us the time we needed. You haven't lost your touch, Dillon."

I shrugged off the intended compliment. "What about the fourth man?"

"No sign of him. We don't even know if he was the main hitter or just an observer to confirm the completion of the hit."

"Will they be safe?"

"Until the trial, they'll have tighter security than the president. Then they'll be relocated. New identities. The works."

"But they'll never be totally safe."

"Nothing in this world is certain, Cass." His green eyes were deadly serious. "You of all people know that." Then he shook off the somber mood and looked around the restaurant. "You've got a great little place here, Dillon. Food's terrific. Service is great."

"We do okay."

"I could steer some business your way."

"All those clones in suits would scare away the decent folk." I shook my head. "Don't do me any favors."

He smiled. "You know, for someone who says the old days are behind her, you're managing to keep your hand in."

"I fell off the wagon momentarily. I'm back on it."

"Are you sure?" His eyes twinkled. "I could use someone like you."

"Now there's a scary thought. The two of us working together."

"Oh, I don't know. I think the idea has a certain merit."

I scooted my chair back and stood, picking up the envelope in the process. "You keep talking like that, Pacheco, and I won't let you have any of Mert's chocolate pie." I started around the table.

"I would have loved to see you shinny over that fence," he grinned.

I popped the side of his head with the envelope. "Pervert."

He laughed. "See you around, Dillon," he called after me.

"Don't count on it."

# UNSOLVED

by  
Robert V. Kesling

*Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?*

*The answer will appear in the August issue.*

The tiny port of Galewind Cove was quaint, in an ugly and sinister kind of way. Sailing captains knew of its unsavory reputation and avoided its anchorage except in the dire necessity raised by stormy seas. Five men drank each night in the Twisted Oyster saloon—but not in jolly companionship. The chandler was rumored to cheat his few customers; the rug dealer smuggled more profitable products in his imports; the saloon keeper was generally disliked for diluting his rum; the sailor was surly and scarred from old drinking fights; and the undertaker was suspected (with good reason) of helping his business along. One of the five was Mr. Yafiz. Each kept his favorite weapon handy.

One dark night outside the Twisted Oyster, one of the five was foully murdered by one of the others.

1. The sailor was dressed all in blue, but none of the others had matching coats and trousers.

2. Neither Bo nor Mr. Wilson had the khaki coat or trousers.

3. The week before the murder, Dan and the man in the brown coat argued with Mr. Wilson and the man armed with the sword.

4. Cal, Dan, and Ed included the rug dealer, Mr. Vonnegut, and the one armed with the blackjack.

5. The chandler, the saloon keeper, and the undertaker were (not necessarily in order) Mr. Wilson, the man in the green coat, and the one carrying the harpoon.

6. As they approached the saloon on the fateful evening, Cal, the undertaker, and the man in black trousers could be recognized in the fog by their blue, green, and black coats.

7. Ed, Mr. Zeller, and the man armed with the pistol were clad in their usual soiled brown, green, and black trousers.

8. As gloom turned into darkness, the man in the green coat lighted a candle on the table in a far corner of the saloon, where he was joined by Mr. Vonnegut and the chandler. There they sat

for two hours—Al, Mr. Zeller, and the man with the knife—hunched over their cups and conversing in low voices. As the candle burned low and sputtered, they made their way to the other two men at the bar.

9. Around midnight, as the murder was in progress, three were still in the saloon, befuddled with grog. Mr. Xander said to the man in brown trousers that he heard strange noises outside, but the third man, who had the knife, muttered that it was probably only the rusty shutters clanging in the rising wind.

10. Even after the funeral, the undertaker grumbled about the bloodstains on the victim's khaki coat.

*Who murdered whom? And with what?*

---

## **SOLUTION TO THE JUNE "UNSOLVED":**

---

The titles of Alfred Hitchcock's movies, in the order in which they appeared in "Our Town," are as follows: *Vertigo*, *The Mountain Eagle*, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *Sabotage*, *Rope*, *The Ring*, *Saboteur*, *Rear Window*, *The Pleasure Garden*, *North by Northwest*, *Young and Innocent*, *The Farmer's Wife*, *Easy Virtue*, *The Lodger*, *Topaz*, *The Paradine Case*, *To Catch a Thief*, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, *Family Plot*, *Frenzy*, *The Birds*, *Jamaica Inn*, *Juno and the Paycock*, *Downhill*, *Number Seventeen*, *The Manxman*, *Strangers on a Train*, *Foreign Correspondent*, *The Wrong Man*, *Secret Agent*, *Torn Curtain*, *Suspicion*, *Blackmail*, *Marnie*, *I Confess*, *The Skin Game*, *The Trouble with Harry*, *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Notorious*, *Stage Fright*, *Champagne*, *Rebecca*, *Waltzes from Vienna*, *Spellbound*, *Under Capricorn*, *Rich and Strange*, *Dial M for Murder*, *Lifeboat*, *The Lady Vanishes*, *Murder*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *Psycho*.

There are fifty-two titles above. The fifty-third movie was the remake of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*.

# MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

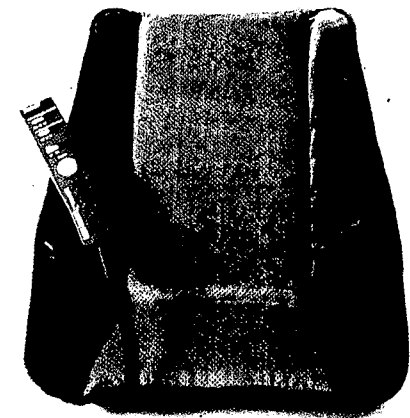
## ▼ THE MAGICAL SPARE BED

It's almost like pulling an extra bed out of a hat. Unlike most spare beds that gobble up storage space and are unwieldy to move, this one rolls down to fit a 36"-long, 3"-diameter canvas case, to stash in a closet corner, car trunk, camper, anywhere. Yet it unrolls in minutes to a full-size 27" x 73" bed that will even accommodate 6-footers, supports up to 500 pounds and is comfortable to boot. The secret's in the inventive construction: a cotton canvas sling is supported on laminated steel legs with 6 steel springs for cushioning and stability on rough ground. Toss the carrying strap over your shoulder and go — camping, beach, poolside; the 10" legs keep it off damp ground and sand. Of course, this bed is indispensable at home, country home, dorm — even for kids in motel rooms. A superb value at **\$61.98** (\$12.25) #A1931.



## ▼ BACK RELIEF BY POLLENEX

Are you one of the millions of Americans who suffers from low back pain? Do hours of prolonged sitting leave you aching or numb? If so, then the Pollenex Back Relief is just what the doctor ordered. Back Relief's unique design cradles your back in comfort and features multiple combinations of massage and heat. The inflatable lumbar cushion conforms to the shape of your back. Dual massaging elements can be used separately or together for full back massage. Handy remote control lets you select upper/lower massage, low and high intensity as well as heat control. And the soothing massager works 2 ways — adapter



#1 plugs into any indoor electrical outlet while adapter #2 plugs into car, van, or truck cigarette lighter. So Back Relief is perfect for car, home, or office. Plush, durable fabric cover adds extra comfort. **\$119.98** (\$6.75) #A2001.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



# MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

## ▼ STEP UP TO A HEALTHIER YOU

Doctors, physical trainers, and athletes agree that stair climbing is one of the best forms of aerobic exercise. You can achieve your fitness goals without the severe jarring or pounding associated with running or jogging. That's why the foldaway ExerClimb™ is the perfect piece of exercise equipment. The ExerClimb™ improves cardiovascular function, increases endurance, burns body fat, and conditions major muscle groups to tighten and tone upper body, thighs, hips, buttocks, and calves. And results can be seen with a twenty minute workout three times a week. It is quiet enough to let you exercise while watching TV or listening to your favorite music. The hydraulic powered ExerClimb™ features sturdy steel construction, magnum series shocks and individual tension adjustment to insure a high intensity, low impact workout. Compact and lightweight (28 lbs.) this incredible machine fits in virtually any size room. When opened for use, it measures 28"H x 27"L x 16"W. Plus, its unique fold-away feature makes carrying and storage a snap. Perfect to take along to your office, trips, or almost anywhere. Some assembly

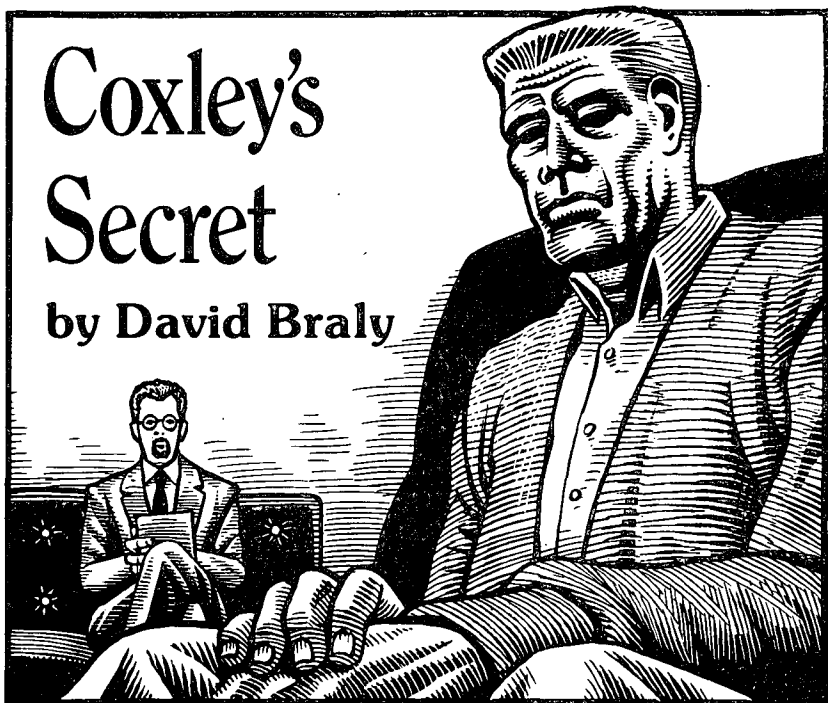
required, using only screwdriver and pliers. For all these great features, one would expect to pay much more, but the ExerClimb™ has a very trim price tag. So now there is no reason not to "step" into better shape. Ninety day warranty. **\$119.98** (\$15.00) #A1998.



**TO ORDER:** Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL DEPT 073 AH**, P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call **TOLL FREE 1-800-722-9999**. NJ residents add 7% sales tax. We honor MasterCard, Visa, and American Express. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. **30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund.**

# Coxley's Secret

by David Braly



**I**t is with considerable reluctance that I commit to paper information that is, by all standards of integrity and professional ethics, confidential. Never have I done so before, at least not with the intention that the information should ever see the light of day. The only records of this sort that I have produced in the past were notes for my own use. The circumstances surrounding the case of Andrew R. Coxley are so unusual, however, and the consequences of my learning about them so foreboding, that I have decided to make this exception.

Because of the large number of military personnel in Maryland, I have several patients who are or were officers in the armed forces. Andrew R. Coxley, Brigadier General, U.S.A. Retired, had first come to see me in the winter of 1987. Only a few years into retirement at the time, he was a tall, silver-haired man with a ramrod straight back and a manner of speaking that was almost as stiff.

Many former army officers are pleased to affect a manner of dress reminiscent of the military, while others do their best to avoid any hint of their past uniforms. Coxley was of the latter disposition, wearing sports shirts and cord pants with Nike running shoes. Nor did it please him to be addressed as "general"; he preferred the simple "Mr. Coxley" and later "Andrew."

His complaint was that he could not sleep nights. He said that he never got more than two or three hours of sleep out of any twenty-four, and spent any remaining time in bed tossing and turning. His wife had insisted that he see a physician. Reluctantly, after several months of insomnia, he had agreed to speak to the family doctor. The physician checked him into Johns Hopkins for extensive tests. After more than a week of examination, the doctor informed him that there was nothing physically wrong with him and, in the most diplomatic language he could muster, suggested that he see a psychiatrist. That was what brought him to my office on Franklin Street.

Immediately it became obvious to me that Coxley's problem did indeed have a mental rather than a physical basis. Normally he was the most candid of men. He talked at great length about his wife and their four children, about his gardening and carpentry, about both daily routine and unusual occurrences. He related how he had been born in the little South Carolina town of Fair Forest in 1915; had entered West Point in 1933 not because he really wanted to be an army officer but because it was the only way a poor boy like himself could get a college education in the depths of the Depression; had served during the Second World War with the Army Air Corps in Africa and Europe under General Eisenhower; had been with NATO Headquarters in Belgium until 1970; and had been in command of a unit in Maryland until his retirement in 1975. He discussed his dreams and his nightmares without inhibition. What he absolutely refused to disclose was what he thought about when he lay awake at night. "It's nothing in particular, just various things," he said originally, but eventually admitted, "It's something I'm not allowed to discuss."

Nor did he discuss it. For five years he came to see me, once a month, at three hundred dollars a session, and he continued to deny me access to the information that we both knew to be the root of the problem. It was as if he believed I could somehow help him anyway. This would be like asking a lawyer to try a case without knowing the charge against his client. Repeatedly I told him that

I could not do it. Repeatedly he told me that he understood this. But still he came every month, and every month he continued to insist that he could say nothing.

"Perhaps if you explained the problem to someone at the Pentagon," I once suggested, "they would declassify whatever secret it is that is troubling you, at least to the extent of allowing you to discuss it with a professional."

Coxley smiled. "Never will they declassify this secret."

"Never is a long time, Andrew."

"All right. Maybe someday. But not in our lifetimes. The whole armed forces would come under attack."

"What else is new?" I asked, trying to make light of it.

Coxley's smile vanished, and his face became as drawn and cold as I had ever seen it. "If I were to tell you what happened," he said, "they would kill us both. They watch me all the time."

For the first time I wondered if Coxley's problem were real. Perhaps he was paranoid. I had no other evidence of it, though, and at last dismissed the idea. Whatever deadly secret the old man was keeping inside him, it was real.

The only hint Coxley gave me of the secret came in the summer of 1991. I had long ago given up trying to worm the thing out of him, for clearly he would carry it with him into the grave (or so I believed, and now wish that the belief had been accurate). I would occasionally refer to it, however, suggesting one way or another that he might deal with it. This particular day I hit upon the idea of trying to separate Coxley from direct responsibility for whatever had happened.

"Andrew, did you order whatever it was that happened?"

"Me? No. I didn't have that type of authority. But I helped carry out the order. I . . . I participated in what happened."

"But you were a soldier, Andrew. A soldier must obey orders. You only did what you had to do. Whatever happened, it wasn't your fault that someone higher up gave the command."

"Tell their babies who were twenty or more and thought the whole thing was over with."

"Uh . . . what?!"

Tears welled up in his eyes.

Never had I seen a former general cry. But that day I did. Coxley bent his head and bawled like a child.

A few months later I learned that Coxley had been diagnosed with a degenerative heart disease. The old general was dying. I

did not expect to see him again. I wish that I had not.

He entered my office without an appointment late one afternoon in October, 1992. The leaves outside were yellow and red and falling, and the general too would soon be gone. He signaled his impending death with every step he took, every word he whispered, every slow movement of his hands. As soon as I could get rid of the patient I had been listening to, I brought him into my office and got him seated as comfortably as I could. I was shocked by his appearance and by the weakness betrayed in his voice. I have seen people with degenerative heart disease, and they did not look as bad as Coxley. He looked more like a man who was being killed by some active agent than by the failure of an organ.

"I need to tell someone," he said. "I need to get it off my chest. I can't carry this awful secret with me to the grave."

My only concern was to ease his mental and emotional discomfort. "Tell me anything you want to," I said. "Whatever you say, it stops with me."

"I know . . . But you must never tell anyone that I told you, even without revealing what I tell you. They will be watching you because you're my psychiatrist. I'm sure that they already are watching you. If they learn that you know, they will murder you, just like they murdered the others."

"The . . . the others?"

"The others who knew. One by one through the years, they have died under mysterious circumstances, or been openly murdered, or simply vanished without a trace."

"How many others were there?" I asked, my voice flat and calm although my mind was in a state of alarm.

"I'm not sure of the exact number, Dr. Carruthers. Maybe a couple of dozen, counting the pilots and the ground personnel. Of course, I don't have any idea how many people knew in Washington."

He was seated in the oversized black leather chair that faced the chair I always used while questioning patients. His head was down upon his chest, his hands gripping the arms of the chair quite hard, so that he appeared an odd mixture of relaxation and tension.

I rose from my own chair and walked to the open window. I knew from news stories that government agents could use electronic eavesdropping devices to listen through open windows or even through closed ones. I stood at the window for a moment, looking down at the traffic below and at the bright autumn leaves in the

distance, and then I pulled the window shut. Not because I believed it would stop someone listening, but rather because I simply felt more secure with it closed. Then I returned to my chair and asked him to start at the beginning.

"It happened in mid-November of 1961," began Coxley. "I was stationed with NATO Headquarters in Brussels, attached to the United States Army Air Force Command. My immediate superior was General Mark Atchinson. You might remember the story about him seven years ago."

"I recall the name," I said. "Something about an airplane crash out west."

Coxley sighed deeply. "He had retired about two years before I did. Kept the secret. Then, seven years ago, he and his wife had just taken off in their private two-engine plane from the airport at Clovis, New Mexico, when the plane exploded. The local police found evidence of sabotage before the federal investigators came in and pronounced the explosion an accident caused by a crammed fuel line. What utter nonsense! As though a retired Army Air Force general wouldn't know enough to keep his fuel line clear. He tinkered with that plane all the time, I'm told. Knew every screw in it and kept it in tiptop condition."

The excitement of the recollection appeared to have fatigued Coxley, and for several minutes he did not speak. When at last he resumed his story, he spoke again in a tone of voice barely louder than a whisper.

"It happened the fourteenth day of November, 1961. A cold, rainy, windy, miserable Tuesday. Terrible flying weather. In fact, nothing was flying from the coast of Bretagne in France to north of the Netherlands and hardly anything even farther north. All flights east out of London had been canceled and most west-bound flights out of Paris, Cologne, Brussels, Amsterdam, and other western European cities had been canceled or delayed. That's why it surprised us when we received a report that a big blip had suddenly appeared on the radar screens, directly over the English Channel."

A chill went down my back. It sounded as though the general was about to relate some sort of encounter with a UFO. I did not want to hear about it. Unfortunately, I was committed, and I owed an obligation to my patient.

"We couldn't understand it," continued Coxley, oblivious to my unease. "One moment the screens showed nothing, the next this big blip. We knew it wasn't a malfunction because several radar

installations picked it up. It appeared on all the screens at the same time, a big blip heading slowly eastward."

Coxley paused, then asked if he could have a glass of water. I went to the cooler and got it for him. He took several sips and handed the glass back to me. I put it on my desk and returned to my chair. In a moment, he resumed the strange story.

"The high command called an emergency meeting. We all went into a conference room: about a half dozen army generals, Atchinson and myself for the Army Air Force, three regular Air Force generals, and maybe two or three colonels who were aides. There were people running in and out for the twenty minutes that we met. Reports kept coming in about the blip. It kept coming eastward, but slowly. Very, very slowly. It might have had a headwind up there as well as being naturally slow. Of course we were scared to death that it was the Soviets."

"The Soviets? Coming from the west?"

"You've got to remember the times, doc. The Berlin Wall had gone up three months earlier. Everybody was tense. We were all afraid that the Third World War was coming. And we all feared that the Soviets had secret, super-sophisticated weapons that nobody knew anything about. We still hadn't recovered from the shock of Sputnik. We speculated that this might be some sort of Soviet airplane that had been able to fly above our radar, then had dropped down when it reached the Channel and headed east to attack us from the last likely direction. Possibly as part of a coordinated attack on two fronts."

Coxley spoke for several minutes about how the international tensions in November, 1961, had caused the generals to fear a Soviet trick and led them into a discussion of various possible—but highly improbable—explanations for the eerie radar blip.

"Finally the commanding general told us to send up airplanes to investigate," continued Coxley. "Atchinson and I left the room and returned to our offices, where we ordered three fighter jets into the air to intercept the unknown craft. It had already passed over the coastline and was flying through the storm over the Netherlands. It had passed almost directly over the Dutch city of Haarlem."

"And it was continuing to fly eastward?" I prompted when he paused.

"Yes, due east. By the time we could assemble pilots and get the planes up, it was well inland. The commanding general had noti-



fied the Pentagon, and the British and French had also picked up the strange aircraft on their own radar systems.”

Again the old man paused, and this time I said nothing to prompt him. I believed he would continue when he was ready without any prompting from me. And I was not even sure that I wanted to hear the end of the recollection.

“Atchinson and I were in the flight control center when Captain Gerhart radioed in. Gerhart was in command of the three pilots who went up. He was a Korean War veteran and had more flight hours than any man in the Army Air Force at the time. Anyway, he radioed and said that they could just barely see the aircraft through the clouds. He said it was an enormously huge airplane with gigantic wings, moving through the clouds slowly and steadily.”

I relaxed a little when I heard Coxley say that it was an airplane. Silly as it might sound, I was really expecting him to tell me that the aircraft had been a UFO, or “flying saucer” as they were called in those days.

“Gerhart kept radioing us,” continued Coxley. “Every minute or so he would radio, saying again how big the plane was or how huge its wingspan. We told him to try to get closer, but in the storm it was difficult to get close without jeopardizing the fighters. However, General Atchinson had notified the commanding general of Gerhart’s report and I believe Headquarters had notified the Pentagon. And then it happened.”

“What happened?”

“One of the fighter pilots tried to cross above the big plane’s tail, hoping to see some markings on the tail that would identify the airplane. As we learned later, he approached from the south, flying north, intending to cross over the tail, which would keep him out of the view of the big plane’s pilot. But he was shot down.”

“Shot down? By what? I mean, how?”

“At first Gerhart didn’t know. He was completely puzzled. And frightened. Finally he decided to close in on the big plane himself, even though Atchinson had ordered him to keep his distance. He violated orders. But Gerhart was that fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants sort of pilot not uncommon at the time. He went in for a look, and almost got killed.”

“The big plane’s pilot fired on him, too?”

“Not the pilot. That’s what he saw. If he had not been in a jet, the gunner would have gotten him. But it was a gunner . . . a tail gunner.”

"A tail gunner!"

Coxley nodded. "The big plane was a Flying Fortress."

The words sent a chill down my spine. A Flying Fortress! Appearing out of nowhere above the English Channel in 1961! Although my imagination had been stimulated into all sorts of conjectures when Coxley began his recollection, not for a moment had I suspected that the big blip on the radar screens had been a Flying Fortress.

"An American Flying Fortress," resumed Coxley. "Gerhart had seen the markings when he flew by it. An American Flying Fortress. One that had just shot down an American jet fighter. Of course, up there, in that storm. . . ."

"What happened next?" I asked, more like a child listening to a ghost story than a psychiatrist listening to an old man reveal what had disturbed his sleep.

"Gerhart tailed it and tried to establish radio contact while we notified Headquarters and Headquarters notified the Pentagon. Perhaps the Pentagon notified the White House, I don't know. I doubt it. The orders came down too suddenly to have gone much higher on the chain of command than the Pentagon. After you've been in the military as long as I have, you learn to detect these things."

"I understand."

"As I heard later, the Pentagon demanded immediate information on where the radar blip had first appeared. They wanted an exact location on the map. That information was relayed to them while Gerhart and the other fighter pilot, Captain Baker, followed the Flying Fortress into what was then West Germany . . . Could I have another sip of that water, doc?"

I got up and retrieved the glass of water. I could feel the chill of it through the glass, so I did not offer to get fresh water. I should have, but frankly I was so absorbed in the mystery the old man was revealing that I was anxious for him to continue. He sipped the water slowly and rolled his tongue around his lips, then handed the glass back to me. I returned it to the desk and myself to the chair.

"What happened then?" I asked him.

"We waited. Waited for orders from the Pentagon. And waited. And waited. The big plane kept going east, with Gerhart and Baker on its tail. The British and French started to send up planes from their bases in West Germany but were stopped by Washington. I

don't know how. And then we received the order to shoot down the plane."

"To shoot it down? An American plane?"

Coxley sighed. "Yes," he said. "An American plane."

"But . . ."

"Atchinson refused. I supported him. The commanding general did not appear inclined to threaten us for disobeying the order, either. I think we all believed that the Pentagon's order was an illegal command. You do not have to obey an illegal command. You can even be prosecuted for obeying one."

"I know. That's what got the Germans in trouble during the Second World War."

Coxley nodded. "Yes . . . so the Pentagon did something very unusual."

"What?"

"They explained the order. They sent a message to Headquarters, which informed Atchinson, who informed me. The message was: The Flying Fortress is being flown by a man who intends to drop a full cargo of bombs on Berlin. Shoot it down or he will ignite the Third World War."

Of course that would be it. A reactionary fanatic of some sort who got his hands on an old Flying Fortress. Maybe a rich reactionary. There were a lot of them in the early sixties. But how did he make it appear so suddenly over the English Channel? And why was the exact location of its appearance so important to Washington?

"We told Gerhart the situation as we understood it. Gerhart shot the plane down near Celle, on the Aller River, in West Germany. I flew there the next day, as soon as the storm cleared, to secure the crash site and recover anything at the scene for shipment to the United States."

"What did you find?"

Coxley waited at least two minutes before he answered. "An American Flying Fortress, with a full crew and officers, all dead. Their dogtags revealed that they were authentic American flyers, men in their twenties who had been born forty years earlier."

The last sentence he uttered had gone right past me, and it was only when he stopped that I realized what he had said. It was a Second World War crew that had piloted the plane to its doom. I did not understand and told him so.

"Perhaps you have heard of the Hengelo affair?" asked Coxley. After I had searched my memory and reported to him that I had no recollection of any event associated with the word "Hengelo," he resumed: "It happened in 1948, in the Netherlands. It was in the European newspapers at the time. I don't know if it was reported in the States or not, because I was in Belgium, but in Europe it created quite a stir."

"It may have done the same here, too, but that was before my time."

"Yes, of course . . . Anyway, what happened in 1948 was that an American Flying Fortress crashed during a violent storm near Hengelo, in the Netherlands, killing all crew members. It was determined by investigators that the plane had left England in April, 1944, on a bombing run to Berlin."

"Wait a minute, Andrew. I understood you to say that the plane crashed in 1948. Did you mean that it was found in 1948?"

Coxley smiled and shook his head. "It left England in April, 1944, part of a squadron of Flying Fortresses bound for Berlin. Crossing the Channel, at the exact coordinates the blip appeared on the radar screen in 1961, three airplanes in the squadron were seen to fade into the air. They just vanished. Four years later, during a violent storm, one of them came down near Hengelo. And in 1961, we shot down a second one near Celle."

For the longest time neither one of us spoke a word. Now the source of much of the old man's aggravation became apparent. He had carried a gruesome secret: that American servicemen who were flying on a bombing mission to Berlin during the Second World War had found themselves being shot down by other Americans in jet fighters. They had never known what hit them. Nor had the families of those men known their fate.

Finally Coxley spoke: "The Pentagon had been waiting."

"Waiting?"

"The first thing they asked for when they learned it was a Flying Fortress was the exact location where it had appeared. When they received that information, they knew who it was and where it was bound, and they gave the order to shoot it down. Someone there had figured out when they found the first plane in 1948 that someday a second plane would appear, carrying its deadly cargo towards Berlin."

The remainder of what he said is now indistinct because my mind had locked so firmly upon what had already been spoken. He

told how everyone involved had been ordered to keep the incident secret and how the generals and colonels had gone about covering up the matter. Not one word, he assured me, got into any newspaper in Europe or America. Even the Celler newspaper was silent about the crash of a huge airplane into the Aller River. The bodies were placed in coffins and flown to England and from England perhaps home to the United States, although he did not know this for a fact. The pieces of the Flying Fortress were all gathered up, crated, and shipped to a warehouse in Alexandria, Virginia, where, he speculated, they remain today. Captain Gerhart died in a fatal automobile accident in 1964. Captain Baker died in a fatal automobile accident in 1965. The other people involved in the intercept died in accidents, were murdered, or vanished without a trace, most of them within a decade of the incident.

As I mentioned at the outset of this memorandum, I would not now commit this account to paper if not for the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the case and the consequences arising from it. Andrew Coxley is dead now. He died the night he spoke to me, at his house, allegedly of heart failure. When I made inquiries, I learned that no one knew who had found the body (his wife died a year before when struck down by a hit and run driver). The body was immediately cremated without medical examination of any sort.

And now, two days after Coxley revealed the secret to me, I notice that I am being shadowed.

Therefore I have written this full account of the Coxley case and entrusted it to you, my lawyer, with instructions that you are to open it if I die suddenly or disappear. If you are reading this paper now, one of those things has happened, and I trust that you will turn this report over to some journalist who can make use of it.

It is important that the world know what happened that stormy November day in 1961. Not because the generals were wrong; their quick action probably prevented the outbreak of a nuclear war. Not even because witnesses to that event have possibly been murdered, although that is outrageous. No, because there were three of those Flying Fortresses that disappeared over the English Channel in 1944 and only two have reappeared—so far.

FICTION

# Professional Touch

by Bob Tippee

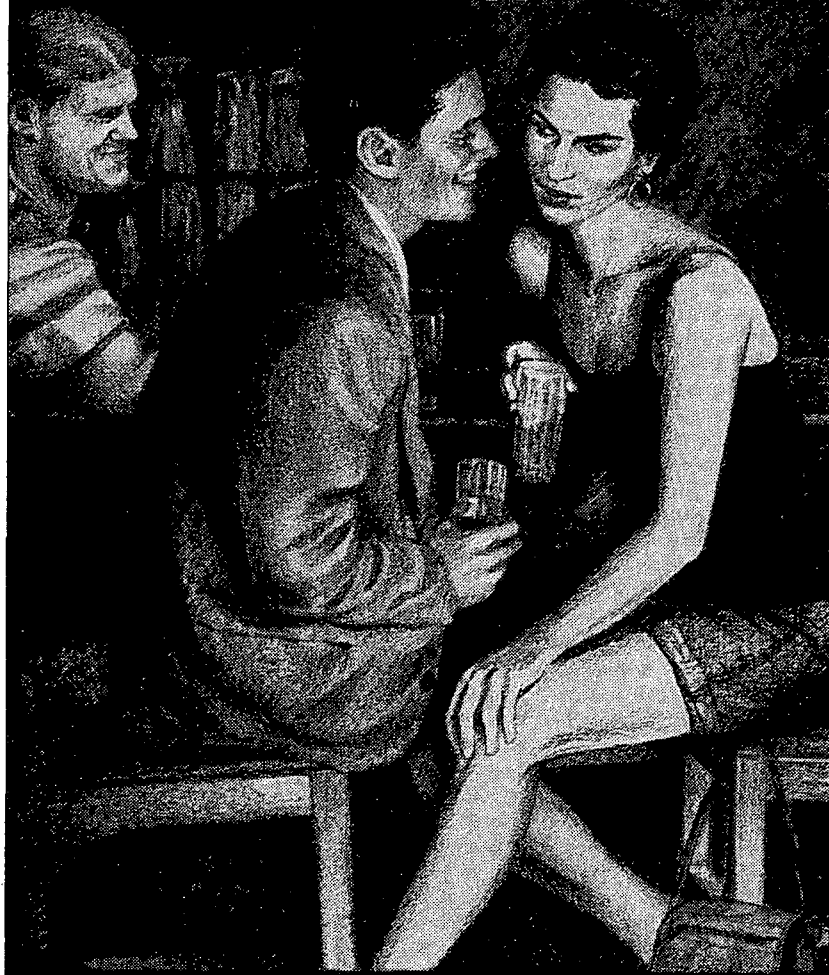


Illustration by Laurie Harden

1150 UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was not a pleasant lunch for Remington Driscoll's father. And Justin Driscoll, founding partner of the law firm of Heathstone, Driscoll and Pine, made no effort to start it right.

"What sort of trouble have you gotten yourself into now?" he asked Remington after the waiter had scurried off to fetch their Bibb salads and bottle of Jardin Bleu '67.

Justin had chosen Perrington's, the best restaurant in Merramec Bend. Excluding the Riverview Country Club, of course. Remington hadn't yet earned lunch at the club. At his current rate of progress, it would be a while.

"Whatever do you mean, Father?" Remington asked breezily. Justin knew that the aristocratic manners—which Remington slid into and out of as easily as he did his navy blazers, striped ties, and burgundy loafers—were contrived to annoy. Remington had the long Driscoll face and the Driscoll cobalt eyes; the early spring tan he had managed on his own.

"The only time you ever want to talk to me out of earshot of your mother is when you need money," Justin said.

Remington set his forearms on the table and leaned forward. "Which reminds me to

thank you ever so much for the last thousand. I'd never have passed the contracts exam without it."

"Why don't you try attending class on a regular basis?" Justin asked, glancing from side to side to make certain no one had heard.

Remington leaned back and sighed. "What a bore!"

"Listen to me," Justin said, slapping the table. "I've fixed up an internship for you this summer at Pete Rawling's firm. Wasn't easy. Southeastern's hardly a top ten school."

"Here we go again," Remington said. "I should have worked harder as an undergrad."

"Damn it! You've got to pass everything this semester. On your own. I've stuck my neck way out for you this time."

"You're the one who wants me to be a lawyer," Remington said dismissively. "Anyway, since I passed contract law I don't anticipate any problems. Except—"

The waiter brought their salads and wine. Justin waited until he had gone and asked, "Except what?"

"It's this girl."

Justin slumped back in his chair and exhaled loudly.

For the first time, Remington frowned and spoke in low, sincere tones. "The doctor wants



half his fee now and half when he delivers the baby."

"When he what?" Justin jerked forward, resting his elbows on the table.

Remington shook his head. "She won't handle it any other way. Says if I pay the medical bill now I'll never hear from her again."

"Like hell you won't."

"She's not a schemer. Waits tables at the Riverbend Cafe. Goes to Mass every week, sometimes twice. I met her at Southeastern. She's taking a computer course. Commutes."

Justin took a deep breath and shook his head. The waiter brought the entrees: linguine al. salmone for Justin and broiled grouper for Remington. Neither of them spoke until they had finished. Then Justin mopped his lips with his linen napkin, took a sip of wine, and leaned forward on his elbows.

"I've thought about it," he said. "Just like I thought about the thousand for your advance copy of the contracts exam. Just like I thought about the five hundred you needed for poker debts. When will this ever end, Remington?"

Remington jutted his chin and shook his head nobly. "This is the last time, Father. I swear."

"What about when the girl needs clothes for her bouncing

new baby? What about when she wants to take a vacation in Cozumel? No, son, you won't have heard the last of this girl when the baby comes, any more than I've heard my last request for money from you."

"I can fix things."

"So can I," Justin said sternly. "I can teach you to behave like a grownup. And I intend to begin now. No, I will not buy you a solution to this latest problem of yours. I will not pay for any future problems. I will pay your tuition, books, room, board. That's all."

At first Remington raised his eyebrows contritely. Then he grinned. Then he laughed.

"I must be such a disappointment," he said sarcastically. "Let's get something straight. My problems derive from the diversions I need in order to put up with the stuffy crap you call a legal education. You want me to have it bad enough, you'll pay the maternity expenses."

Justin had to fight his rage.

"I'm not in the habit of taking orders from you," he said. "Maybe you're right. Maybe law school isn't right for you."

"A threat!" Remington said, laughing. "Father, you rogue!"

Justin slapped his napkin onto the table. "I've heard enough. If you'll excuse me, I'll return to work, where I have some decisions to make."

As Justin started to rise, Remington said, "Brett Fleming."

Justin sat back down. "What did you say?"

"Brett Fleming," Remington said again.

"Keep your voice down," Justin hissed. "What are you talking about?"

Remington shrugged. "Ten thousand dollars. Maternity expenses. And, of course, a little something to make certain people involved stay quiet."

"That's outrageous!"

"You're a busy man," Remington said. "You have decisions to make. And we both know ten thousand is pocket change to you."

Justin sighed and slumped into his chair.

Remington linked his fingers and in a businesslike way said, "Naturally, I've confirmed the woman's condition. Name's Crystal Worth, by the way. I wrote her address and hours on this card, in case you'd like to confirm." He shoved a file card across the table. "The doctor demands anonymity. You can understand."

Justin said nothing.

"Just information to help you make your decisions," Remington said, crossing his arms. Then he whispered: "Brett Fleming."

Justin sighed. "You can pick up a check at my office tomorrow morning."

**B**rett Fleming lived in a two bedroom apartment complex between the Highway 16 Wal-Mart and twenty miles of rolling corn and wheat fields. It wasn't a bad place. Most of the residents were young couples who had married and bred too soon and now barely made ends meet. Except for the unsupervised kids, it was quiet, which let Brett work on articles for *Military Adventures Magazine*.

Mostly, however, he waited for orders. He was always waiting for orders. Sometimes the waiting got to be too much, the writing too boring, so he freelanced if the money was good and there seemed to be some purpose in it.

Brett worked in one of his apartment's two bedrooms, where he kept a portable electric typewriter on a folding card table. He didn't trust computers. Computers were for wimps. The rhythmic tack-tack-tack his portable electric made when he was really getting into it reminded him of small arms fire in a triple-canopy jungle. The sound of real work.

He had a series going in *MAM*, three installments al-

ready in print about some drug enforcement work he did in Colombia. The editor wanted him to stretch out the rest of the material as long as he could with description and detail, even if he had to make some of it up. Which was fine with Brett. He was a long time between orders.

Brett had rented the few essential pieces of furniture in his apartment. He hung nothing on the walls. He didn't own much and kept what he did own in suitcases and satchels beneath his bed. Then of course the Uzi, the 9 mm pistol, the .32 derringer, and assorted knives and grenades in a padlocked closet in the bedroom where he worked. And the .25 peashooter beneath the driver's seat of his rusty Duster. And the eight inch switchblade taped beneath the headrest.

He was working on the fourth installment of his Colombia series when the telephone beeped for the first time in months.

He answered with his phone number. The caller responded with a number, which Brett locked into his memory before hanging up.

"Who was that?" a woman called from the other bedroom, the one where he slept, with her sometimes.

"Nobody," Brett grunted as he stomped through the short hall on his way to the apartment door.

"Where are you going?"

"Noplace."

"Can I go?"

Brett said nothing and slammed the door.

Justin Driscoll hated subterfuge. He tried to be up front with people. He wore thousand dollar suits and five hundred dollar shoes because being up front meant making impressions. Subterfuge was for slouches who wore bluejeans and jogging shoes and who conducted their affairs from pay telephones outside convenience stores.

He recited the number when the telephone rang. It was the number of the pay phone outside the convenience store where he had been pretending to read a newspaper in his thousand dollar suit and five hundred dollar shoes.

When the original number cracked back in his ear he asked, "You at a pay phone?"

"What do you think?"

Justin sighed and rubbed his forehead. He hated pay phones, too. God knows whose ears, whose greasy hair, had last pressed against the receiver. "We got problems."

Brett Fleming said nothing.

"My kid knows about the Robert Scheer thing."

"Yeah. You at a pay phone, too?"

"What do you mean, 'yeah'?"

"I told him."

"You what?"

"I asked if you was at a pay phone."

"Of course I'm at a pay phone."

"All right. You still owe me twenty-five grand."

"You'll get your money."

"You won't return my calls. How'm I supposed to get it?"

"You'll get your money when I think it's safe for us to meet. Now, what's with telling my son? Are you crazy?"

Brett Fleming chuckled wickedly. "All he knows is my name. I told him if he ever wanted to get your attention to tell you my name. I figured sooner or later he'd want something and push the button. Then you'd finally return my call. Clever?"

Sweat stung Justin's neck where the starched collar of a silk shirt closed in around it. "Reckless," he said. "Reckless as hell. Now he knows your name."

"Oh?" There was music in the question.

Of course, Justin thought: Brett Fleming wasn't the assassin's real name. Of course.

"I got another job," Justin said.

"Another lying, uppitty lawyer who tricked you into a bad investment again, I hope. I hate bastards like that."

"A woman."

"Sorry. I don't do just anybody. Especially broads."

And, Justin knew, he wouldn't "do" a woman whose only offense was having slept with Remington Driscoll on the wrong day. "A hooker," he said. "Trying to blackmail my son."

Brett Fleming laughed so loud Justin had to pull the earpiece away until he had finished. "I ought to charge extra for setting your kid up with my name. Without the squeeze, you wouldn't have known anything until it was too late. A hooker looking for easy money. That's too much."

"Can you do it?"

"You got a hundred grand?"

"You're nuts! That's twice—"

"Scheer was easy," Brett Fleming snapped. "Two shots in the head, leave him slumped in his car: looks like the work of those buddies he was supposed to have in that crowd of hardcases from St. Louis. Which, if he had any, I'd have known about by now, so if you thought you could put off paying what you owe me till I turned cold in some dark parking lot—"

"I told you: I'll pay you when I think it's safe."

"It's gonna have to get safe quick on account of I'm not hanging around your cosy little town much longer. After another job, this clean Midwestern air may get a little hard for me to breathe, you know? And with a hooker I got to make the stiff disappear. Nobody who knows her's gonna turn up asking questions. It'll be clean, only I'll have more expenses—handling fees, you might say. A few more risks."

Justin clenched his jaws and said, "It's outrageous."

"I could make it two hundred grand," Brett Fleming said. "You could pay it. This way you can get the cash quick."

"How will I know you did the job?"

"Trust me."

"I'm no fool, Fleming."

Brett Fleming snorted. "I'll show you the stiff. We'll set up a meeting someplace dark and lonely and safe. You get to see the stiff, I get my hundred and thirty-five grand."

"That's ten thousand too much!"

"Corpus delicti costs extra, counselor. I'll be in touch."

Brett Fleming allowed himself a smug chuckle as he took the steps to the apartment's second floor two at a time. It

had gone well. He knew better than to feel too good. But damn, it had gone well.

And what would Justin Driscoll think if he ever found out that Brett Fleming really was his name—except to readers of *Military Adventures Magazine* and his government clients, of course. Civilians were godawful suckers.

Inside his sparse apartment, he found a handwritten note leaning against the wall behind the kitchen sink where he couldn't miss it:

"Hi! Had to go to work. Hope our big fish took the bait. You got a call: 555-8659. Don't know what about. Call me. Luv, Crystal."

Damn. After everything's going so well with Justin Driscoll, Brett Fleming was in the mood for a few beers and Crystal. What a woman. Meeting her had made it easier waiting around for the rest of what Justin Driscoll owed him. Waiting around, lying low, watching his step. In case Scheer really did have dangerous friends. Sort of a laugh in a place like Merramec Bend, where farmers came to sell grain, city folks came to rent canoes, and college kids came to spend money. Where Brett Fleming had come to wait for orders and heard about Justin Driscoll's troubles with Robert Scheer and saw the

chance to make some easy money on the side.

Then Crystal. Brett had been letting her down lately. Too much on his mind. Too much time between orders, too much time waiting to get paid by Justin Driscoll.

And there was the thing with that cherry law student, Justin Driscoll's kid. It shouldn't have bothered him, but it did. Thinking of Crystal with that whiny wimp, Crystal who liked her men tough as nails, who liked her men to be men. Her man. Brett Fleming.

Damn, he wished she was here.

Anyway, he had a call to make.

"Five-five-five eight-six-five-nine."

"You called. What?"

"Brett Fleming?"

"You got the wrong number."

"Don't hang up! I got, you know, a job."

"Who's this?"

"Name's Remington Driscoll."

"Sorry. Doesn't ring a bell."

"I got ten thousand dollars. That enough?"

"For what?"

"A job."

"I'm not that good a writer. Who is it you want me to, uh, interview?"

"First tell me if ten thousand is enough."

"Maybe."

"Guarantee your work?"

"Like I said, it depends on the subject."

"Nobody anybody knows. Name's Crystal Worth."

After two shifts with no breaks during or in between, Crystal Worth was tired. Too tired. But Brett was waiting in his car in the apartment parking lot when she got home.

"Business is good," he said. "Got anything for a successful man?"

Crystal knew better than to tell him no. Brett was more than a successful man; he was a dangerous man. She had found out the hard way.

Jingling through her keys outside her apartment, she asked, "Cup of coffee?"

"Got anything hotter?" He put a meaty arm around her shoulders. She could feel its weight in her aching knees.

He hadn't been this way in weeks. The Driscoll job had pumped him up. As much as she could, she let him believe the plans were his ideas.

"You gonna ask me about my day?" he asked as they stepped into the tiny apartment living room.

She tossed her keys onto the kitchen counter to her left. "I'm not supposed to ask you about your business."

"Good." He grinned and pointed at her. "Very good. Except this time my business is your business."

"I'm really tired," she said.

"So let's skip the coffee." He chuckled as if he had said something funny.

Remington Driscoll had passed the place a million times between Merramec Bend and Southeastern: a country tavern with a chat parking lot all around, a wheatfield out back, scrubby oaks and cedars beyond the chat on the sides, a Budweiser sign near the road with neon letters underneath: "Ruth Ann's."

There were no windows or doors on the front wall. Remington entered through a swinging glass door on the right side, passed through a short dark hall with a cigarette machine against the wall, and found the place smaller inside than he had expected. On his left a sleepy looking man with a crewcut and arms as big as normal people's legs washed glasses behind the empty bar. Straight back, men in grimy baseball caps and overalls surrounded two pool tables, smoking, drinking beer, chiding the

players. To the right were tables and booths, about one-third occupied by young men and women in bermuda shorts and denim cutoffs, T-shirts and tank tops. They had to be students from Southeastern.

Remington ordered a scotch and water from the hulk behind the bar, who barely glanced at him, and shuffled to an empty table near a booth where two couples sat drinking and softly talking.

One of the men asked, "Go to Southeastern?"

"Law school," Remington said.

"Pull up a chair."

Smiling, Remington joined the group, endured the introductions, learned who majored in what, and feigned enough fascination to earn admiring glances from both women. Remington had a knack, and he knew it.

"Never stopped in here before," he said after twenty minutes of school talk and a round of drinks on himself. "Always thought it was sort of a redneck place."

One of the men, Chuck, glanced at the overalled pool shooters across the room and said, "It is. The farmhands just ignore us." He jerked a thumb toward the bartender. "Glenn there keeps the peace."



Remington glanced toward the bar. "What do they feed that guy?" The women laughed.

Chuck lowered his voice. "Glenn used to play pro football. Pretty good, I hear. Got hurt. I think it was a head injury."

Laughter again, but one of the women, a short-haired blonde named Vonnie, rushed to Glenn's defense. "He's a nice guy. I feel sorry for him."

Chuck nodded and got serious. "I didn't say he wasn't a nice guy. Loves to talk football if you've got the time. Just, you know, sort of dense."

"Well, he's not retarded or anything," Vonnie said.

"Smarter than a lot of the football jocks at Southeastern," said the other man, Richard. More laughter, and the subject changed.

Remington stayed for one more drink. He had found what he needed.

The call came to Justin Driscoll's airy, booklined office at five after eight in the morning. He could hear traffic in the background. He caught his breath, expecting to hear Brett Fleming's voice. Fleming was supposed to call when he had his plan worked out, and to arrange the meeting time and place where Justin could make

certain he had received his money's worth.

"You got a problem." It wasn't Brett; it was a woman. "I got a solution."

Justin didn't recognize the voice. "What problem? Who is this?"

"Brett Fleming and Robert Scheer."

Justin chilled. Brett Fleming was supposed to be the only other person who knew that Scheer, contrary to the newspaper reports, had not been murdered by professionals from St. Louis.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Justin slumped into the high-backed leather chair behind his desk, sweat soaking his collar once again.

"Don't worry about me." The woman's speech was thick and loud. "Brett and I are in the same line of work, more or less. Got together for a drink last night. More than one. Guess his main squeeze hasn't been keeping him warm nights lately. Anyway, by morning he'd told me more than he should have. He figures he can trust me, us being in the same line of work and all. Only now I know more about him than he knows about me. Which makes you and him a lot alike, the way I see it."

Crystal Worth was afraid.

Brett Fleming was taking her to the cafe where they had a chicken-fried steak as big as a plate and all the rolls you could eat. Brett's favorite place. A good meal before business.

That's the part that scared her. You never knew exactly what Brett Fleming meant when he said business. This time she thought she knew. She thought she had figured everything. But she couldn't be sure, not with somebody like Brett.

Afterwards, he said, they'd go get a drink.

Afterwards. Right.

Justin Driscoll shifted his weight from foot to foot and hunched his shoulders against a night chill that didn't exist. The grove of cedars, atop a bluff overlooking the Mississippi, hadn't been hard to find. He had parked his rented Camry in a shopping mall lot on the edge of town and walked two miles to the spot along a gravel road where Brett Fleming said they should meet.

There was no moon. Maybe that was why Brett had changed the meeting date twice since they began discussing plans.

It was a good place. Quiet except for an owl somewhere in the pines down the road, a steady breeze, the roar of a free-way invisible through half a

mile of woods parallel to the river and gravel road.

Justin had come half an hour early to make sure he and Brett Fleming would be alone. Brett was fifteen minutes late. For forty-five minutes, wearing old bluejeans, a sweatshirt, and a denim jacket, Justin had stood in the woods, listening, paying hard attention to the night sounds, listening for Brett Fleming's car, for anyone else.

Sometimes, he thought, a man must wear and do revolting things in order to protect his family, his accomplishments. A successful man, at any rate. A careful man. Sometimes a successful man finds himself deeper in a situation than he wants to be. So he deals with it. That's what makes him successful.

Justin heard the car while it still was half a mile away, grinding slowly up the road, lights out. He hid in the trees as the dark form came into view, climbed the knoll overlooking the river, and stopped. The parking lights came on and went out, came on and went out. The signal.

Justin pulled the flashlight from his hip pocket and turned it on and off twice. Then he stepped from the trees toward the car.

"Got the money?" Brett Fleming, leaning out the win-

dow on a thick arm, sounded coarser, meaner in person than he did on the phone.

"Do you have something to show me?" Justin asked, his voice cracking at the end. He felt his heart in his ears.

Brett Fleming got out of the car and closed the door just enough to extinguish the dome light. "Show me the money."

Justin pulled a brown envelope from his pocket. Brett switched on a flashlight. Justin opened the envelope's flap and riffled through an inch-high stack of thousand dollar bills.

"The trunk," said Brett Fleming.

They went to the rear of the car along opposite sides. Justin's throbbing head felt like it would explode as Brett opened the trunk with his key.

The body was wrapped in a clear plastic tarp, legs folded, bent at the waist, back toward Justin and Brett. The tarp had been folded back and tied with nylon rope at the knees. A green trash bag, tied at the chest, covered the head.

"I—I want to see her," Justin said.

"You gonna do an autopsy?" Brett Fleming chuckled at his joke, at Justin's obvious nervousness, as he untied the rope holding the trash bag.

Sliding off the green bag, he parted the layers of clear plas-

tic, which extended over the head. Justin aimed his shaking flashlight beam inside and found the damp, brown hair and still forehead. The eyes, he was grateful to see, were closed.

"That's enough," he said, handing Brett Fleming the envelope and switching off his flashlight.

The assassin slammed shut the trunk and, holding his own flashlight in his mouth, began counting thousand-dollar bills.

"For God's sake, man, it's all there."

Brett Fleming pulled the flashlight out of his mouth. "Looks that way. You'll hear from me if anything's missing. If not, it's been a pleasure doing business, but don't call any more on account of I'm taking a permanent trip."

"What are you going to do with—" Justin jerked his head toward the car trunk.

"Don't worry. It's a clean job. Anything else?"

Justin shook his head and felt his jaw quivering.

Brett Fleming chuckled. "What? You afraid I'm going to shoot you, too? Now, that'd be a damn fool thing. Like I said, it's been a pleasure. If you'll excuse me, I've got some arrangements to make and a plane to catch."

\*

Brett Fleming almost regretted that he wouldn't be taking Crystal Worth to Rio with him. She had struggled out of her damp shorts, T-shirt, and underwear and now slouched naked in the passenger's seat, freeway lights dancing across her fair skin as she pulled a towel and fresh clothes from a nylon zipper bag.

Brett switched on the dome light.

"Damnation, Brett!" Crystal squealed, hunching down in the seat. She had a terrific body. She would have been great in Rio. But ten thousand dollars was ten thousand dollars. And this way he didn't have to share the take from Justin Driscoll. He had shared Crystal with the Driscoll kid to set up the old man. Crystal said it was just business, which didn't mean Brett had to like it.

He switched off the dome light. "I told you not to sweat."

She dabbed herself with the towel and began to dress. "It was hotter than I expected. And breathing through that hose was like sucking fire. Thought I was going to cough."

"Wasn't any way he was gonna spend more time than he had to looking at you," Brett said. "Like I told you, civilians got weak stomachs about things like dead people."

He knew he shouldn't have said it.

"Like I told you . . . like I told you," Crystal said, mocking him, wiggling into her shorts. "Like I haven't got any brains of my own."

Keep it up, Brett thought. She was only making it easier for him.

Crystal must have sensed his annoyance. She tugged on her blouse and added, "Of course, we couldn't have pulled it off without your professional touch."

She slid next to him and rubbed the inside of his thigh.

"I want a drink," he said.

"There's a bottle of gin at my place." She rubbed harder.

"We'll stop. Place I heard about up here." Crystal's hand felt good. That and the fact that Crystal probably figured he'd gone totally fag on her almost made him want to forget the rendezvous that the Driscoll kid had insisted on at a place called Ruth Ann's a couple of miles up the road. Almost, but not quite. In Rio a man with ten thousand extra bucks could get his thigh rubbed by somebody different every night if he wanted to.

Glenn Durkee had tended bar Tuesday through Saturday nights at Ruth Ann's

for five years. It had been that long since an illegal crack-back block had ended his promising career as a defensive tackle. Not counting the six months in the hospital.

Glenn was a good bartender. Most of the time he could remember which customers wanted to talk football and which didn't. He knew how not to sell one too many to a smart-aleck. And he knew how to use two hundred sixty pounds of his quiet brand of orneriness to handle smart-alecks who talked back.

It was a pretty usual Thursday night. The place was maybe half full, students mostly. Glenn recognized a few of them. Not drinking much. Sitting at the tables and booths surrounding Ruth Ann's two ancient but well-kept pool tables. Half a dozen or so were women, two of them playing pool in tank tops that dropped low when they shot and denim cutoffs, high and tight.

Nobody sat at the bar, asking questions about what it was like playing pro ball. Glenn didn't mind. He was thinking about spring, when you'd healed from the season before and started getting back into shape before the eating and drinking turned it into too much work, and about denim shorts stretched so tight you almost couldn't get your hand un-

derneath. Glenn really liked spring.

"Gin on the rocks," somebody said. It was a guy he'd never seen before, too old to be a college kid, too worn-looking. He had a woman with him, younger, nice-looking with great legs, great everything. Looked like she'd been sweating, like maybe she'd been jogging or maybe she and her boyfriend had been out in one of the hundred secluded places in the woods around Ruth Ann's, sampling the wildlife.

"And the lady?" Glenn asked.

The guy grunted, and the woman ordered for herself. Scotch and water. Decisive as hell, like Glenn should have already known what she wanted.

At least the guy paid for both drinks. Then he swiveled on the stool and leaned his back against the bar. No football stories for this guy. The woman stared at her drink, like Glenn wasn't there.

Back to the pool game, tonight Glenn's favorite spectator sport, thanks to the coeds. And just when Glenn was getting into the action, the woman at the bar turned around, grabbed her boyfriend's arm, and jerked her head toward the door.

Must have been a real nature lover.

\*

Crystal Worth grabbed her head when she and Brett Fleming stepped into Ruth Ann's parking lot.

"I can't believe it," she said. "We stop at an out-of-the-way podunk place like this and he's in there. Think he saw me?"

Brett Fleming had to force himself not to smile. Of course Remington Driscoll had seen her. It was the plan. Remington wanted to make sure Brett had the right mark. Smart, that Remington, who had no way to know she'd been shacking up with Brett all along.

And now Brett had shown Remington that he, Brett Fleming, could pick up a looker like Crystal and get her to follow him into anyplace he wanted and, after that, God knows what. Remington must have been impressed as hell. He should have been.

"How was I supposed to know he'd be in there?" Brett asked. "Sure it was him?"

Crystal looked at him like she was surprised, like how could he be so dumb thinking she couldn't recognize somebody she'd duped into thinking had knocked her up? Yeah, right, Crystal. You'll get yours. Good idea, bringing Crystal by just to be sure. Great idea.

"So what if he saw you?" Brett asked innocently. "So you

got another boyfriend. Big deal."

Crystal folded her arms across her chest and walked the rest of the way to the car in silence. There were six, maybe seven other cars and pickups in the parking lot. Nobody was outside.

Brett unlocked the driver's side door, got in, and reached across the seat to unlock the passenger's door for her. She slid into the seat, then said, "Damnation. I forgot my purse."

"You what?"

"My purse. In the bar. Give me that little gun you keep under the seat."

Brett snapped his head up as she eased back out of the car. "How come?"

"Money's in my purse. If anybody got cute in there, I want to make sure I get back what I took in."

"I'll go." Brett opened his door.

Crystal laughed. "I can't wait to see you carrying a purse. Give me the gun. Just in case. I'll just be a minute."

Brett shook his head, grunted, and closed the door. God damn woman. It would have been like this the whole time in Rio. Always screwing something up.

He reached under the seat and pulled out the .25 semi, the

peashooter he kept there for no particular reason. A little thing like that wasn't good for much except at close range.

"Careful," he said. "It's loaded."

Crystal tucked the shiny weapon under her arm. "Don't leave without me."

"Right," said Brett, laughing. He switched on the radio, thinking maybe he'd see if she was in the mood to stop somewhere dark and quiet before he took her home and earned his ten thousand bucks, which should already have been transferred to his account in Rio, and made it look like the work of a burglar who got caught.

"Excuse me."

Glenn Durkee took one more look at the rolling maroon tank top at the pool table and turned to the customer, a young guy who'd been drinking with three of the college kids in the corner. He was holding up a bulging brown purse. Glenn thought he'd seen the kid a time or two before, but then all these college pukes looked alike.

"Somebody left this." The guy pointed to the foot rail on his side of the bar.

"Thanks," Glenn said, taking the purse and backhanding it onto the shelf below a rack of beer glasses.

"Scotch and water," the kid said. "Be back in a minute." He ambled past the pool tables and disappeared in the hall leading to the restrooms and rear door.

The front door opened, and Glenn looked back to his right. The woman who had just left with the older guy entered on long strides, looking back over her shoulder.

"You believe that jerk?" she asked when she reached the bar, like Glenn was supposed to know what she meant. "Hey, where's my purse?"

Glenn pulled it off the shelf and handed it to her. "I tossed the drinks when you left. Sorry. You left the purse on purpose?"

She nodded. "To get away from the creep. I'm heading for St. Louis. He was giving me a lift to Merramec Bend but stopped here and started talking like he wanted more than a drink. You know? He got the message. Scotch and water."

Glenn made two and set them on the bar, one in front of the woman, one in front of the empty stool next to her.

"Hey, one's my limit," the woman said. "I want to make it to St. Louis by morning."

Glenn shrugged and chuckled. "The other's for the guy who turned your purse in."

The woman made a show of looking around. "Yeah?"



"In the john. What about your ride to Merramec Bend?"

She turned and sipped her drink. "I'm just glad to get rid of the creep who brought me this far. This guy—?" She switched her head toward the lonely drink to her side.

"Could have ripped off your purse. I'd have never known."

"Hmmm." The woman looked back at the hall.

The kid came out a couple of minutes later. A while later he and the woman left together, smiling. Turned out the young guy was heading for St. Louis, too. He was now, anyway.

Glenn doubted they'd make it to St. Louis before the nookie bug hit. He could spot sex before it happened. It was a sixth sense, like reading blitz before the snap. And his old lady had the nerve to call him insensitive.

Justin Driscoll carried a red nylon zipper case past the airline ticket counters, restaurant, and gift shop. It was late afternoon, a busy part of the day, and the little terminal building was crowded.

Any of the women could have been Brett Fleming's assassin. He had never seen her, never even guessed at what she might look like. All he knew

was that she would be watching.

That and the fact that she knew too much.

Justin hated the guile of it but sensed, this time, that he was dealing with a professional. She had told him she could solve his problem.

He read about it in the morning paper: Brett Fleming, a suspected trigger man for a gambling syndicate in St. Louis, had been found in the parking lot of a country bar with two .25 caliber slugs in his skull, the pistol, untraceable, lying on the seat next to him. Clearly a professional job, the paper said. Probably had something to do with Robert Scheer's death. An investigation was under way.

The article mentioned a woman who had been with the victim when he entered the bar. But the bartender said the woman, who mentioned something about being from out of town, had dumped the guy and hadn't been in the parking lot long enough to kill him. Her purse never left the bar, and she wasn't wearing enough to hide a gun anywhere else.

By the bartender's recollection the woman had brown hair and a great tan. She had been wearing a maroon tank top and tight denim cutoffs, he thought.

Anyway, she left the place with a man from St. Louis about an hour before another customer found Brett Fleming's body. Authorities saw no reason to seek her for questioning.

It was neat, Justin thought. The woman had whisked suspicion in the direction of what people wanted to believe and away from what really happened. Professional.

Justin himself would spend the rest of his life wondering whether the woman in the bar was the woman who had called with the solution to his Brett Fleming problem. He would spend the rest of his life wondering what happened to Crystal Worth's body and the hundred thirty-five thousand dollars he gave to Brett Fleming. He would spend the rest of his life breaking into a cold sweat each time his telephone rang.

And if he never heard another word about any of it, he would consider the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in the red nylon zipper case, which he now stuffed along with all its risks into the metal locker, the best investment he ever made.

Except for the pounding heart and shaking hands, it had been easy: the gun dropped

where he could find it and Brett Fleming couldn't see; the sneaking between cars and pickups to Fleming's Duster; the rock music Fleming played on the radio, head bouncing in time, right hand slapping his knee; the two shots; the pistol wiped clean, dropped onto the seat beside Fleming's slack carcass; the sprint back to the bar through the rear door—all of it taking no longer than your average tippy trip to the john.

What a woman, that Crystal Worth. She had planned everything, from the double con on Remington's father to the setup of Brett Fleming. And now she no longer had to live in perpetual fear of a dangerous lover. Now she had three hundred ninety-five thousand of Heathstone, Driscoll and Pine's mysteriously earned dollars to share with her new lover, who could afford to kiss law school goodbye. With Crystal's brains and his ability to get things done, there was no telling what they might accomplish together.

Yes, thought Remington Driscoll, the few panicky moments, the ugly, unforgettable way Fleming's head had jerked forward and erupted with the first shot, then turned, eyes wide, anticipating the second, had been worth it.

He paid for his hamburger and fries, coffee and fruit tart, and carried his tray to the table in the corner to wait for Crystal. It was a late lunch. There were only a couple of dozen students in the cafeteria.

And Crystal, he was surprised to see, already sat at the corner table where so often they had met before.

"Skip your computer class?" he asked.

She shook her head and handed him a brown envelope. "Your split's in there," she said.

"My split?" He grinned and slid into the seat across from her. "Don't you think I trust you?"

She didn't smile. Her eyes were cold. "Of course you trust me. You don't have any other choice."

He laughed out loud and squeezed mustard out of a plastic envelope onto his hamburger. "We've got plans to make. Like where to live. Want to go to the registrar's office with me while I tell them where to stuff law school?"

Still impassive, Crystal said, "No. No, you're not going to the registrar's office. You're going to finish this semester with passing grades. Next semester you earn straight A's. Then you transfer to a decent law school. It will be arranged. All you've got to do is study like hell."

Remington frowned his smile away. "You sound like my father."

Crystal smirked and picked up her purse.

"What about—" Remington's voice broke. Where was the pouty flirt who had entered his life so suddenly, loved him, cried to him about her perilous entanglement with Brett Fleming, schemed and plotted and carried out the adventure of a lifetime with him, and solved both of their major personal problems in the process? He cleared his throat and tried again. "What about us?"

"We—" He flapped his hands toward her, back toward himself, toward her again, conjuring yesterday's intimacies. "I mean, we—"

"We work for the same people now," she said. "That's all."

She started to scoot out of her seat.

"Wait," Remington said frantically. "We are good. We made a lot of money." Then he chilled. "What do you mean we work for the same people?"

She stood, stunning in a snug, black skirt and white blouse buttoned close to her neck. She looked stern, businesslike . . . old.

"Look at it this way," she said. "You've turned pro."

Remington waved his arms, palms up. "I don't get it. Wait! Don't go!"

She leaned down, bending close to his ear. "Just remember two things. Never do a job until you've figured every way there is to make money from it."

Remington could hardly hear his voice over the pounding of his heart. "Job? What job? You mean this was all a job?"

She chuckled and kissed him on the cheek. Now her age was clear; it showed in her eyes, age and something else, something like hatred and fear.

"Goodbye, Remington," she said.

"Damn it! What was your job?"

She shrugged, glanced around, and whispered, "No harm, you knowing. Two jobs: Make things right about Robert Scheer, and find somebody young and loyal to replace him. Two jobs that turned into one.

Do well in law school, Remington. There are worse jobs in our organization."

Remington grabbed her wrist to keep her from turning away. "What—?" he blurted. But her head snapped toward him, and her eyes narrowed fiercely. Obediently he lowered his voice. "I just wanted to ask what the second thing was you said I ought to remember."

Her eyes turned tender again. She smiled. "The professional touch, something your father understands but Brett Fleming didn't: always get somebody else to do the messy work."

Staring at the round, clenching hips as she sauntered away—memories closing in behind the receding shape—Remington Driscoll tasted the acid rush of imminent nausea and prepared to pledge fealty to the tyranny of a career.

---

(continued from page 4)

now retired, but was an Air Force meteorologist in World War II and subsequently worked "mainly in market and opinion research for advertising agencies and associations."

Mr. Orenstein is the author of six mystery novels, all published by St. Martin's, including *Murder on Madison Ave-*

*nue, The Man in the Gray Flannel Shroud, A Killing in Real Estate*, and most recently, *Off with the Old* (1991). His first story for AHMM, "But I Never Go to Chelsea," appeared in our April, 1991, issue.

He has traveled extensively in Europe, Egypt, Turkey, India, China, and Japan.

FICTION

# Sliding Paint

by Jeffry Scott

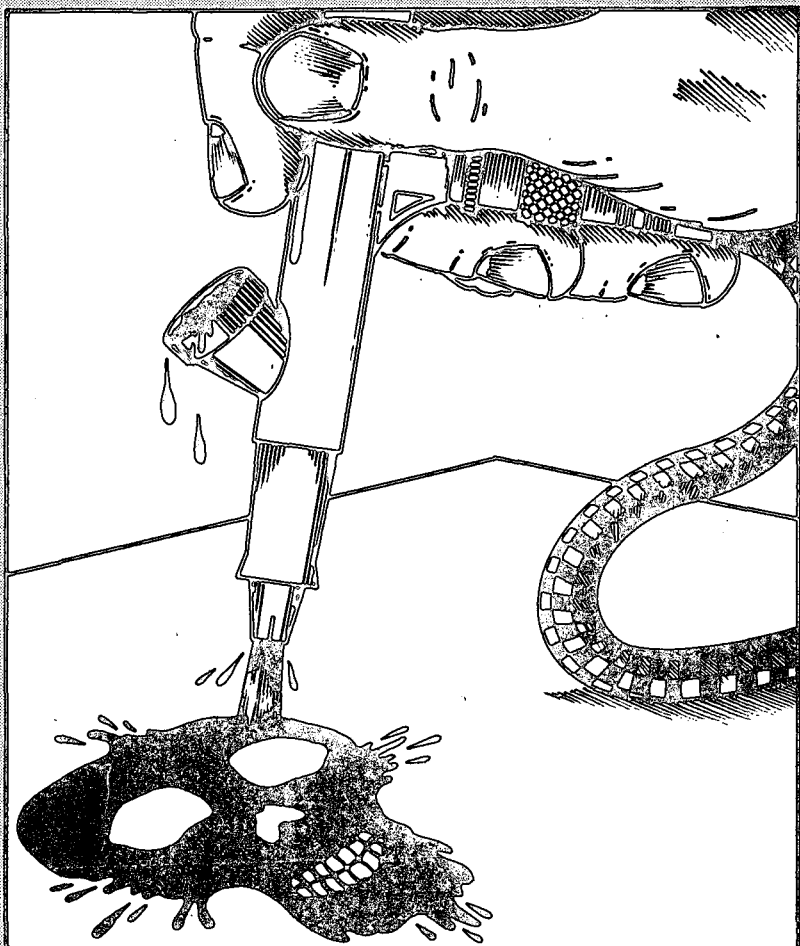


Illustration by Richard Sauer

135

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

“**Y**ou’ve made  
what?” Jerry  
Maybe demand-  
ed. “It does *what* on exposure to  
air?”

Obviously Vogl was testing another pay phone with his latest cheating gadget, equally obviously the test was a flop. Vogl had got through, but his voice was impossibly distorted, submerging in electronic chaff.

“Skip it,” Jerry Maybee shouted. “I’ll be over later, you can tell me in person.” Hanging up, he pulled a face. From long experience as Waldemar Vogl’s paymaster and only friend, he knew that the questionable genius rang to mourn setbacks, never to announce victory.

On Maybee’s arrival, Vogl greeted him alarmingly by performing an ungainly little dance. “One step forward, three back,” he explained. “For every breakthrough, a hundred broken legs.” Tools of the inventor’s trade littered the disused aircraft hangar where crazed Vogl lived and toiled, eccentrically. Among and over crates, a vertical drill set, a beautifully maintained lathe, and sundry carboys of nameless, probably unnameable fluids, armored power cables writhed like jungle creepers.

“So what,” Jerry Maybee inquired, not unkindly, “have

you screwed up this time, you old fool?”

It was an indulgence, a caprice, to subsidize Waldemar Vogl, stateless person, illegal immigrant, doctor of engineering, philosophy, and who knew what besides. Tanta-mount to playing a one-armed bandit. Reason argued that a jackpot must come up some day. Thus far, there was a humiliating shortage of cherries, bells, or plums in an orderly row. . . . The device for duplicating video cassettes without using a conventional recorder—a project pregnant with illicit possibilities—had worked in theory, but each bootleg tape would have cost a thousand pounds. Vogl’s universal bank card had destroyed countless money machines without winning a penny.

On the up side, the indulgence cost Maybee nothing, since he fed other people’s coins into the Vogl slot. They were unaware of this; it saved arguments, he felt.

Vogl opened the fridge and tossed a can of beer to his guest. “I show you magic trick.” He hustled away, and a compressor cleared its throat before settling into a patient purring. Vogl reappeared, adjusting plastic goggles and a breathing mask. Allergic to washing and able to take shaving or leave it

alone, he was a demon for safety.

"Observe," he commanded, muffled by the mask, and leaned a grimy white plaster-board panel, about the size of a chessboard, against the brick wall. Vogl went to the workbench and returned with an airbrush at the end of a long hose. He sprayed the panel, turning it from off-white to wetly gleaming green with a brownish glaze.

Jerry Maybee's eyes narrowed. When Vogl switched off the gun, Maybee stooped and extended a finger. "That's a coincidence," he muttered. "Perfect match."

Vogl, rather deaf and not a good listener anyway, misunderstood his patron's interest. "Go ahead, touch—is dry already. Good, hey? So I thought, in my folly. Okay, turn your back and I show you something in a minute."

Jerry Maybee, seldom happy at being controlled, frowned as he obeyed. "Thinner," Vogl lectured. "That was the start, *nu*? You tell me many times, find out what people want. So I am in do-it-yourself store—hey, I steal what I need, your bounty is not being wasted. Man wants varnish in spray can. Good line, two fluid ounces of varnish sells for price of liter tin because morons like convenience of no

brush. Manager say he will not stock this stuff no more. Use once, then varnish sets solid, blocks spray, make it *kaput* but good. Which is bad—customers complain, take money back. And I think, this same thing true with many paints, with nail color for ladies, so forth. So I start work on superthinner substance, keep everything liquid."

Vogl grimaced, mask pulled down and dangling like a poorly applied false beard. "Three weeks I try. Now I succeed beyond wildest dreams. Life's a bitch, is it not?" Grinning at Maybee's puzzlement, he added sharply, "Turn round, examine painted panel."

The green-brown square had disappeared. The nearly white one had returned. Jerry Maybee spoke coldly. "Very clever. You turned the thing around—" His accusation tailed away. He'd kicked the plaster-board away from the wall, infuriated by a clumsy con trick. Retrieving the thing, he examined it closely. Neither side betrayed a trace of paint.

Behind him, a blocked wastepipe gurgled: Herr Dr. Vogl was chuckling. "Look on ground. I put board on grid to drain, but some will still be in cracks of floor." Sacrificing one knee of expensive trousers, Jerry Maybee knelt and



peered. Sure enough, glittering green lines with bronze haze decorated the edges of the rusty drain cover.

"Sliding paint," Vogl mourned. "Goes on, dries as it touches. Ten seconds later, back to liquid state only more so: friction is affected by this process, I lubricate molecules and gravity does rest, okay? Paint what don't stick slides and slides instead . . . tell me what the hell use is my grand discovery."

Jerry Maybee, wiping his fingers on a show handkerchief, sniggered disgustedly. "Sliding paint! You're a card, Waldo. Three weeks to knock up the ultimate useless product. Brace yourself—nobody needs unzipped molecules. You've cracked it at last, perfection in something, pity it happens to be in defeat."

Driving back to London, he pondered over his protege's unwanted discovery. That American chap had produced an adhesive that wouldn't stick very effectively—and became a multimillionaire on the strength of peel-off-and-use-again memo pads. . . . It was all a matter of lateral thinking, finding a hole to fit the peg. He sniggered again, at himself. Sliding paint . . . The man who found the hole for that peg would be

a bigger genius than the peg's maker.

"What it is," said Bennett Truro, "you're a risk I can't take any longer." His narrow face pinched in at the temples, old fashioned Coke bottle style, and he had far too much chin. His feet were up on the desk, his hands in his pockets. If firing an associate upset him, he was masterly at hiding grief.

"Ah," Jerry Maybee observed, "the more-in-sorrow-than-anger approach." He spoke lightly for somebody whose stomach was in an express lift heading for China with the rest of him stuck at sea level.

"I'll be sorry if I keep you on, old son," Truro agreed feelingly. The offices outside this suite were hushed; the rest of the staff had long since departed for the day. "Let's be frank, I knew what I was getting into, taking a stroke-puller on. You do pull strokes, Jerry—I'd say constantly, only that sells you short, dishonestywise."

"It's what I'm for," Maybee broke in with not wholly feigned pride.

"Quite. Your, um, vocation was what appealed to me. Only . . . You know I believe in the power of the subconscious mind. Something pops into our

heads, it's there for a purpose. Lately I keep recalling the fable about the frog and the scorpion. Scorpion asks frog to ferry him across the river. Not likely, you'll get on my back and then sting me to death, says frog. Rubbish, scorpion reckons, if I do that, you sink and I drown. Seems reasonable, so the frog takes him on his back, and when they're in the middle, the scorpion stings the frog. 'Why, when we'll both die?' asked the frog. 'It's my nature,' says the scorpion. I won't bother to draw the moral for you."

Jerry Maybee sighed, overtly bored, inwardly relieved. This was general needling, not crack-of-doom confirmation that Bennett Truro had caught on to his embezzling. "I never was much for natural history, Ben."

"Me neither. My subconscious is just telling me we have had the best of each other, businesswise. Seeing you are a twister for fun as well as profit, a way of life as one might say, I'd be a fool to expose you to temptation for too long. And expose myself to disaster—but you get the picture.

"Fair play, you've got a zillion oddball contacts, know heaps of useful people. You've shown me plenty of ways of making an extra bob, and some

were even legit. Not to mention ways of keeping those extra bobs from the tax man. On my side, I've paid you royally and no doubt you have ripped me off for as much again. A good deal benefits both parties, I've nothing against that."

Maybee's smile was genuine. *As much again?* Truro, through ignorance, was demonstrating classic British understatement.

"But," Bennett Truro continued amiably, "the best of friends must part, Jerry. Keep the office car, you would anyway. A redundancy payoff doesn't figure: you will have drawn it, one way or another, by now. Which sort of streamlines things, avoids formal severance procedures. Don't hurry, leave any time you like providing it's soon, no more than a week."

Once Truro, who fancied himself a philosopher, got hold of a theory, he tended to thrash it into submission. Leaning even farther back, hands clasped behind his neck, he appeared to be addressing the girlie calendar above Jerry Maybee's chair. "I wonder why you're such a crook." His tone was genuinely interested. "By all accounts, you've got family money on the horizon—don't need to hustle."

"Uncle Fred." Maybee was laconic. "Still got the first quid

he ever made, with a million more keeping it company. Him being a bachelor and me the only nephew, I'm main legatee, it's no secret. Then again, he's hardly ' sixty; doesn't drink, smoke; stays away from bad women. Sticks to a high-fiber diet, really looks after himself, the selfish old sod. Only reason I'm down in his will is that Unk is a sadist."

Responding to Truro's raised eyebrows, Jerry Maybee snorted, "I'm down to inherit right enough. Minor snag is, there's a strong chance Fred will see me out, dance at my funeral. Meanwhile, he has the pleasure of watching me sweat: it's a vintage so-near-and-yet-so-far job."

Almost seriously, he speculated, "All that money hanging over my head since I was a nipper is what made me . . . well, a touch hungry, a tiny bit sharp. Stands to reason."

Bennett Truro grunted dubiously. "No, it's your nature, you've got corkscrew genes." He swung his feet off the desk, exasperatingly chummy. "Ready for a drink? I would be, in your place. My treat, natch."

At which point, Jerry Maybee was dazzled by an inspiration. Factors spinning in his mind for the past few minutes had assumed a pattern, as if his head were a kalei-

doscope. Had there been a glass in his hand at that moment, he would have made a silent toast. To sliding paint.

But aloud: "I'll take a rain check, thanks. Places to go, people to see—one of my famous contacts, matter of fact."

An hour later, Waldemar Vogl, a squalid blanket clutched round his skinny frame, was opening the door to a late caller. "Back again so soon? Ah, you think of a purpose for the substance, yes?"

"No chance," Jerry Maybee lied, "but I need a drop to try for myself." Secretly anxious, he stared around the junkheap. "You have got some left?"

"Only twenty liters too many," Vogl responded sourly.

"Stick half a gallon or so in a can, that'll do. Look sharp." Jerry Maybee, rubbing his hands, had turned cheerily incisive. He smothered a chuckle. He ought to have grasped the possibilities straight away: low-friction paint for a slippery customer.

Watching the old man decanting a beetleshell-bright stream of paint, Maybee spoke casually. "Any special reason for picking that color, Waldo?"

The inventor cursed in motley languages as the can overflowed, splashing his bare feet. Then, feeling a premonitory tickle as it started losing adhe-

sion, he shrugged. "The color? I have much left over from when we try automatic respray device on your friend's car."

"And a lovely job it did," Jerry Maybee taunted, "providing three blokes nursed the contraption from start to finish. That's two more than do the work the hard way."

Vogl, scowling, clapped the lid on the can. "The materials were defective." He skidded into a reverie, can swinging as he drew a schematic in the air. "Titanium struts! It needs titanium struts, Jerry."

"Very likely." Jerry Maybee gave him a look closely allied to affection. "You're not a bad guy, for a nutcase. Come on, hand over, I'm a busy bee."

But the next couple of days he did very little, so far as outside observers could have discerned. He sat in his office, one floor below Bennett Truro's, ostensibly winding up his deskwork while a transistor radio burbled just below audibility threshold for anyone outside. Jerry Maybee was listening to weather forecasts.

On the third day he clutched the little radio, kissed it, and crooned, "Bingo." Then he went out through the basement and spent five frenetic though well rehearsed minutes working on a car.

\*

Bennett Truro's long face poked around the office door. "Emergency's come up. One of Mother's neighbors phoned my secretary just now, reckoned she's poorly." Palely hearty, he added, "False alarm, like as not. That's why she won't have the phone in, crafty old bat—so I have to see for myself. And they joke about *Jewish mothers*!"

Elderly Mrs. Truro lived the far side of Birmingham. "Would a neighbor ring if it wasn't serious?" Jerry Maybee pondered aloud. Having made that call, using a yokel accent, handkerchief over the mouthpiece, he had a vested interest in its acceptance. "Better get going, Ben. Supposed to rain soon, and you're a right tortoise in the wet. . . ."

Few men admit to deficiencies behind the wheel. "I'll be there in two hours," Truro snapped.

"Fifty quid says you can't do it." Jerry Maybee waved dismissively. "Just kidding, Ben. Hope your mum's better, whenever you manage to turn up."

"Motorway madness," Sergeant Fenner groaned. "They never learn." Home from another harrowing spell on road patrol, he had spoken sharply to his child and growled at his wife. Now he was apologizing,

obliquely. "Chap this afternoon, London businessman with a flash car and delusions of immortality . . . Hitting seventy, minimum, it comes on to rain, and he lost control. Swerved across two lanes, smashed into a truck . . ."

"Was he killed?"

"I certainly hope so, he had the engine block in his lap when we came along. Can't have been too comfortable unless he was a goner."

"I don't think that's very nice," Mrs. Fenner retorted stuffily. Before he could defend himself by arguing that either you made black jokes or burst into tears, she scolded, "What's that all over your tunic?"

"Paint. Must be off that blasted car." Sergeant Fenner raised an arm, rubbing a sleeve between finger and thumb. "Yep, no mistaking that color. Funny, it's still wet . . . Here, it's coming off a treat, and no mark left behind, that's a bit of luck."

His wife yanked a sheaf of paper towels from the dispenser by the stove. "Hold still, Billy, else you'll get it all over your hands and mess up the whole business. You're right, that saves another drycleaning bill."

"Can't be paint, then. Some kind of plastic undercoat, I dare say." What with supper and

their favorite TV show, the matter was soon forgotten.

"I hear your mate Truro's firm collapsed after he got himself killed, stupid road hog. Best part of a quarter million quid missing. Nothing to do with you, I suppose?"

Jerry Maybee, fox's eyes reproachful, studied his tormentor. "Nice one, Unk. If you kept your ear a bit closer to the ground, you'd know Ben had a track record for cheating on tax. Nearly went to prison last time, and the fine was astounding. Bank on it, whatever is unaccounted must be salted away in a numbered account, Zurich way."

Correction: well laundered and earning interest in Grand Cayman, he ached to boast. "What's more, I resigned from Truro Enterprises long before Ben kicked the bucket. He'd asked me to stay on as a consultant, so I looked in there most days, that's all."

Visibly disappointed, Uncle Fred recovered soon enough. "You look terrible, son. Too much living on your nerves. Your dad was the same way, always sickly. Taken before his fortieth birthday—wonder if it's a case of like father, like son?"

Jerry Maybee's expression was so blank that his uncle

cheered up considerably. The shaft had gone home. Uncle Fred loved these weekly visits, just as he had loved pulling the wings off flies and setting fire to ants in his unlovely childhood.

His nephew was finding it hard not to laugh. He was thinking that Uncle Fred stood scant chance of surviving to discover whether Jerry would make old bones. In half an hour he was setting out to drive from his home in deepest Surrey to a City banquet. Already the sky was dark, livid. Jerry Maybee estimated that the rain would start within minutes of Uncle Fred's departure—pleasantly apt word, in the circumstances.

Rain would fall, making Uncle Fred activate his windshield wipers and then, or very soon afterwards, the screen-washing spray. Ideally that event would take place on the way down Two Mile Hill. The washer's tank had been drained of its proper fluid and

the plastic jar held an inch of sliding paint. Ready to spray fan-shaped patches, spread by the busy wipers to dry near instantly, blindingly, across the windshield. By the time the wreckage was examined closely, the paint would have slid off onto the bodywork.

It wasn't guaranteed to kill the old buzzard. Nothing in life was certain, not even death. But judging by the late Bennett Truro's test drive, sliding paint was unlikely to do Uncle Fred much good.

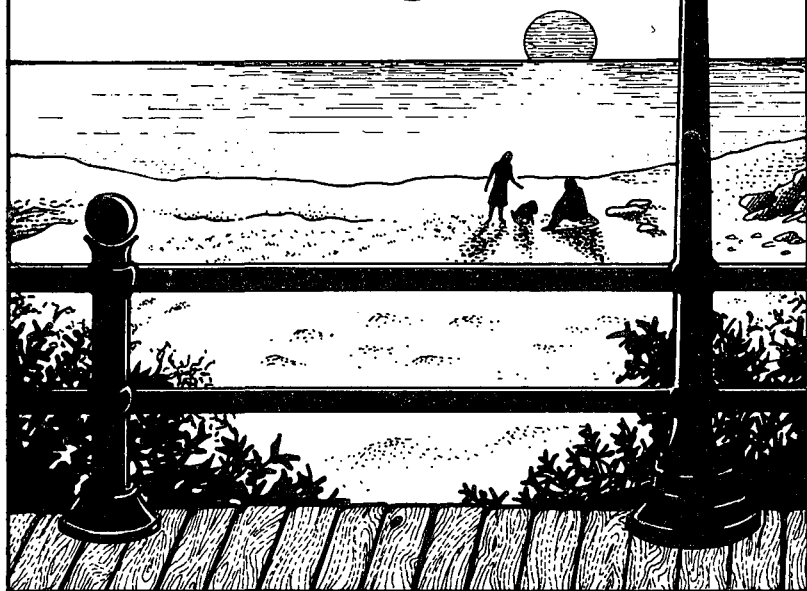
Truro had insisted that his murderer was ethically tone-deaf, a committedly devious soul. But that was not quite right. Attending his uncle's funeral the following week, Jerry Maybee did experience a belated pang of regret, the contrite sense of being responsible for injustice.

It was a shame and a scandal, but he would never be able to congratulate Vogl on stumbling, after so long, on something incredibly useful.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

# The Chocolate Dog

by  
**Margery  
Allingham**



**T**here is a time-honored theory that the mysterious, the uncanny, the miraculous, or even the plain honest-to-goodness peculiar are all properly appreciated only in a half light.

Mr. Albert Campion, sitting on a lump of rock in the blaze of a pure white dawn, reflected on this belief and rejected it. He rubbed his eyes cautiously with his bathing towel—yet the man, the girl,

Copyright © 1967 by Margery Allingham, reprinted by permission of P. and M. Youngman Carter Ltd.



and the dog did not disappear but remained in earnest consultation just below him on the dazzling sand.

They had not seen him, and since it is natural to prefer not to intrude oneself upon any sort of visual phenomenon, he remained perfectly still, his lean body melting into the pinkish crag behind him.

In all directions there was loneliness. There was not a sail or a ripple on the glassy water, not a parasol or a beach pajama on the sand, and in the near distance the planes and pinnacles of the discreet esplanade were as deserted as an empty plate.

The man and the dog sat facing one another, and the girl looked down at them. They were all creatures of that slight fantasy which is the most fantastic of all—the not *quite* right.

The girl was perhaps the most nearly normal, although sheer female beauty of the idealistic kind is still unusual enough to be surprising; and as she stood with her weight on one hip and the dawn light turning her hair to white fire, she was quite sufficiently miraculous to take any ordinary man's breath away.

The man and the dog were more definitely unlikely. They were both so astonishingly formal. The man sat on a flat stone in much the same attitude and costume in which he might have presided at a board meeting. He was a smooth elderly person, meticulously shaved and clad in pearl gray suiting and spats. A ring glistened on his little finger, and an eyeglass dangled from his neck.

The dog sat on the sand and he sat as anyone else might sit, with his legs stretched out in front of him, his solid four inch tail, supporting much of his weight like the flap at the back of a photograph frame, being his only curtesy to dog construction. He was smooth-haired and chocolate-colored, with the lines and contours of a miniature carthorse, and he sat and surveyed the sea behind his friend with the thoughtful, contemplative air of one who rests.

Far up over the cliffs behind Mr. Campion a cock crowed and the girl straightened herself.

"It's getting late," she said unreasonably.

"Yes," said the man regretfully. "How do you feel about it, Theobald?"

The dog turned his head slowly, as though loath to take his eyes from the shining water. He sighed, an exaggerated gesture, and got up with dignity. He stretched himself carefully, each leg separately as dogs do, and then, before Mr. Campion's startled eyes,

went through a further process of limbering up which dogs as a rule do not.

He raised his left paw and let it dangle alarmingly, as though the bone were actually broken, repeated the exercise with his right, dragged his left back leg behind him limply, and afterward did the same thing again with his right back leg. He hung his head until his nose was buried in the sand, rolled over on his side with his eyes turned up, and finally, having satisfied himself that every single part of him was in reliable working order, set off at a portly stroll scarcely faster than his companions, who walked after him quietly.

They passed out of sight at length, not with any haste nor yet with the dilatory luxury of those who stroll. They went purposefully, all three of them, as if such a promenade was part of their career.

Mr. Campion watched them go and afterward went back to his hotel feeling a little light-headed and uncomfortable. The tall houses of the watering place still had the blank eyes of sleepers, and he felt like a trespasser in a dormitory.

He slept most of the days as people who get up very early in the morning because they cannot sleep sometimes do; and when he descended into the lounge of his hotel about cocktail time, the light over the sea was the familiar blue and gold, the esplanade was dotted with parasols, and the sands were alive with children of all ages and their colored toys.

The magical quality of the dawn had entirely disappeared and the world was once more a solid material place of ice cream vendors, evening papers, and white-coated waiters carrying drinks on trays.

He remembered the vision of the morning with self-tolerant amusement and decided that the girl could not have been so beautiful, the old man so formal, nor the dog so—well, so businesslike.

This was his first real introduction to his hotel, at which he had arrived very late on the evening before; and as he sat in a corner tasting his sherry a misgiving nudged him. The wine was good and the room was charming, but he began to regret the well-meaning friend who had recommended the place as the ideal retreat for three days of complete rest.

The annoying thing was, of course, that the hotel was *exactly* as the friend had described it—exclusive, quiet, and thoroughly English, with good food and superlative service; but Mr. Campion

had forgotten the natural corollary of these attributes, which is, of course, the next best thing to the silence of the tomb.

Everybody was there, all the dear old familiar faces; the colonel and his lady drinking in whispers in a corner; the elderly lady and her companion knitting with muted needles; the pleasant plump mama with the two pretty twin daughters who looked away regretfully when the colonel's young son glowered at them.

The Anglo-Indian widow was also there, languishing alone over an iced drink and a magazine; the two bachelors who did not know each other but who sat close together for protection; the hearty young woman and her girlfriend who lowered their happy healthy voices the moment they laid aside their golf clubs in the hall and came to join the father of one of them dozing under a palm—these and several others, all exclusive, English, and perfectly quiet.

Mr. Campion was not a jolly person himself, but a long association with all sorts of people in the course of his profession, which was criminal investigation, had cured him of his native self-consciousness; and the presence of so many people who clearly all liked—or at least considered—each other so much that they were prepared to become virtually dumb lest they offend or discommode anyone else got on his nerves.

It seemed to him that among people who had this one great quality of self-sacrificial politeness in common there must be other less Spartan grounds of comparability; yet he knew, as the others did, that one unguarded remark addressed to a stranger must produce the swift change of color, the guilty glance round, and the frigid commonplace which would add another layer to the ice.

It was actually while he was wondering if a great national disaster would break the barriers, or a natural phenomenon such as pink snow shatter this stultifying delicacy, that the chocolate dog came limping in. He was in a most pathetic condition. His left forepaw hung helplessly, and he dragged himself across the parquet on three faltering legs. In the center of the room he collapsed with a thud and turned up his eyes.

Immediately there was a general rustle and a scraping of chairs. Then the silence became absolute. The dog looked round him mutely, made a gallant attempt to sit up and beg, collapsed again, and howled very softly once.

"Poor chap, he's hurt." It was one of the golfing young women. But before her solid brogues could carry her across the floor, the colonel had thrown down his paper, the elderly lady had cast aside

her knitting, and the two bachelors had risen to their feet. The Anglo-Indian widow was the nearest and she got there first.

Five minutes later Mr. Champion himself joined the anxious throng. The dog was a little better. A committee of experts had examined his foot. The colonel gave it on his word that no bone was broken. The father of the golfing girl, who had a pack of hounds, suspected rheumatism. The Anglo-Indian widow was inclined to agree with him. The plump mama had persuaded the invalid to take a lump of sugar, and the elder of the bachelors was holding the basin for her.

"A nice chap," said the colonel's son to one of the pretty twins. "What is he?"

"Spaniel and labrador, first cross," submitted the younger bachelor.

"Terrier somewhere there," said the colonel.

"Hound, I should say, sir," ventured the elderly lady, "with those ears."

"What's his name?" asked the prettier twin.

They tried them all and the dog was helpful. At "Jack" he looked blank, at "Jim" bewildered. "Rover" seemed to amuse him, "Smith" left him cold. But at "Henry" he barked.

"That's the name of a friend of his," said the colonel. "Seen a dog do that before."

"Rumpelstiltskin?" suggested the elderly lady's companion and everybody thought what a nice woman she was.

Mr. Champion forgot his superiority complex and cheated.

"Theobald?" he suggested.

The dog sat up and stared at him in astonished contempt. Never in all Mr. Champion's career had he met such a glance of withering disgust. A nark! The words were not uttered, but they went home and Mr. Champion blushed.

"He doesn't like that, does he?" said the colonel, laughing. "What is your name, boy? 'Rex'?"

The abashed Mr. Champion turned away from the crowd and came face to face with the girl of the morning. She really was beautiful, he was surprised to see, as beautiful as she had first appeared. She was looking at him reproachfully, a puzzled expression in her eyes.

"I'm sorry," he murmured.

"So you ought to be," she whispered and pushed through the crowd.

It took him all evening to get hold of her alone. The little hotel was like a parrot house. Since everybody now knew each other, it was only late arrivals who were not talking.

The colonel, the elderly lady, her companion, and the elder bachelor played bridge in an alcove. The plump mama and the colonel's wife chatted happily about their children. The widow listened to the father of the golfing girls, and those young women joined the twins, the spare bachelor, the colonel's son, and a group of other young people.

Mr. Champion found the beautiful girl in the hall waiting for the elevator.

"You're not going up already?" he protested. "It's livening up now. Won't you join us all?"

She shook her head. "It's not in the contract."

Mr. Champion felt a little helpless.

"I'm so sorry about the name," he began, "but you see I saw you on the sands this morning with Theobald and your . . . ?"

"Father," she supplied.

"With your father," he repeated. "I still don't understand, you know."

The beautiful girl laughed.

"Don't you? I thought you were a detective."

"So I am," he said desperately, for the elevator was descending. "That's one of the reasons for my disgusting curiosity. Look here, will you promise to give me an explanation tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow we shall be gone," she said and, stepping back into the elevator, was whirled up out of his sight. . . .

But the following morning, when he was lying awake wrestling with a distinct sense of frustration and regret, he was roused by a discreet tapping rather low down on his door.

Theobald was in the corridor, fit and hearty as ever, with no trace of paw trouble. He cocked an eye at Champion, gave his tail a perfunctory wag, and dropped a small white card at his feet before he galloped off to the staircase.

Mr. Champion took up the pasteboard and found it to be a professional card neatly engraved.

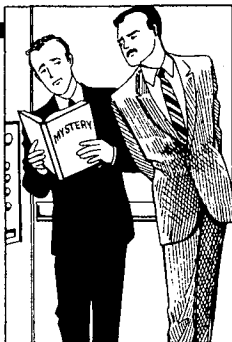
*Theobald and Co., it ran. Introductions arranged. Hotel service a specialty.*

On the back, in a round clear handwriting, a single line had been penciled.

*Primbeach next week.*

# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



One of the delights of following the investigation of an amateur sleuth is the promise of a fresh slant on those age-old tales of lust, greed, and revenge. Simon Brett's Mrs. Pargeter series is certainly off the beaten path. As the widow of a British crime boss, "Mrs. P." has the means and the opportunity to go where she pleases. In **Mrs. Pargeter's Pound of Flesh** (Scribners, \$20), this proves to be a posh health spa run by a former crony of the late Mr. Pargeter. While her friend is sweating off the pounds, Melita is poking her nose into the odd affair of an unregistered guest, a young woman whose corpse indicates that dieting can be deadly. Look to Brett for a lively wit and a colorful cast of characters, all those ex-colleagues of the late and much-lamented crime boss who are ever ready to assist Mrs. P. in her investigations.

Fans of Amanda Cross and the academic mysteries of Joan Smith should relish **My Sister's Keeper** (St. Martin's, \$17.95), the second Gillian Adams mystery by Nora Kelly. Adams heads the history department at Pacific Northwest. As one of a handful of women in the upper echelons of academia and administration at the university, she is keenly aware of the blatant sexism and anti-feminism that are being passed off as part of the university's "traditions." So when her help is enlisted by the newly formed Feminist Union on campus, it is, in part, her long-held disgust with the administration's tolerance of sexism that convinces her to take a controversial stand. But it is also that Gillian is impressed with Rita, a grad student and founder of the Feminist Union, a brilliant

young woman whom everyone is sure will get a coveted university fellowship. Kelly shows how boyish pranks inexorably escalate to harassment and sick violence, and how easily one is "seduced by the signs of order: the clipped lawns, the books arranged in rows, the bellstruck hours. Reassured, we bless the rude freedom of ideas and expect a safe place to send a daughter or to say things people don't want to hear." As in all good mysteries, however, evil lies masked until an intrepid investigator reveals the truth.

First novelist Toni Brill makes a bright splash on the mystery scene with **Date with a Dead Doctor** (Worldwide, \$3.99). Midge Cohen is the consummate New Yorker, single and saddled with a pushy mother, Pearl, who's always trying to save her only child from spinsterhood. Nice Jewish doctor he may be, but Dr. Leon Skripnik turns out to be the blind date of nightmares. What he really wants is for Midge to translate a letter he's received from a long-lost cousin in Russia—and she got dressed up for this? The next day Pearl points out that Skripnik has made the newspapers. "Murdered?" I asked with that very urban little shudder, mostly horror at what a hell the city can be, seasoned with something almost like pride that at least it's never dull." Midge's first-person narrative buoys up the tale enormously.

Barbara Neely has introduced a new face on the sleuthing scene in **Blanche on the Lam** (Penguin, \$4.95), and this reader can hardly wait to catch up with Blanche on her next case. Blanche White is a middle-aged African-American who works as a domestic and raises her sister's two orphaned kids in North Carolina. Her problems are real and not few: when the novel opens, she is fleeing a jail sentence for inadvertently bouncing another bad check. As luck would have it, that day's temp job is for a wealthy family headed out of town to their country place. When a body turns up, it looks as if Blanche has jumped from the frying pan into the fire. If you're looking for a believable heroine who manages to live in the real world without losing her unique identity, her compassion, her common sense, or even her strong sense of humor, I recommend that you get acquainted with *Blanche on the Lam*.

From Edgar-nominated author Thomas Cook comes **Mortal Memory** (Putnam, \$21.95), a haunting tale of psychological suspense that keeps readers guessing until its final pages. When Steve Farris was nine years old, he came home late from school one day to discover that his father had taken a shotgun to his mother, older sister, and big brother; then he vanished. Steve is now a successful



businessman, married and a father himself. A woman journalist who's writing a book on men who kill their families opens up the Pandora's box of Steve's memories—and his life is changed forever. Don't pick this up unless you've got time to read it through to the end, because you will do so whether you plan to or not.

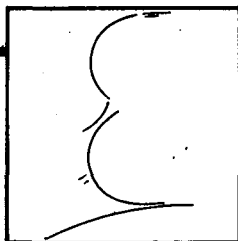
**The Stolen Gods** by Jake Page (Ballantine, \$18) is the debut of an unusual series set in fertile ground for a storyteller. Santa Fe is home to Mo Bowdre, a blind gentle giant and a well-known wildlife sculptor who lives with an Anglo-Hopi woman. The FBI's suspicion that the murder of a successful art dealer may be linked to the theft of some Hopi deities brings in another fascinating character, the agent on the Hopi case. *The Stolen Gods* gives readers a look at the art world and the reservation, the Sante Fe of style and money, and the grubby on-the-road life of a smalltime criminal hoping for the big score. We even get an inkling of how the mind of a blind sculptor works.

K. C. Constantine's blue-collar police chief, Mario Balzic of Rocksburg, Pennsylvania, is back in **Bottom Liner Blues** (Mysterious Press, \$18.95). One doesn't take up with Mario and the guys at Muscotti's to see much action. You hang out with Mario and you gotta listen to a down-and-out writer harangue his listeners (including you, dear reader) over the injustice of authors' royalties unconnected to public library usage; or eavesdrop as Mario's wife explains, in tones of quiet desperation, the loneliness she feels since her mother-in-law's death. Constantine has an impeccable ear for the cadence of real speech.

Bishop Regan's mugger sent him to a wheelchair a few years back, and not long thereafter the beat cop who helped save Regan's life accepted the bishop's offer of a part-time live-in job. Since then, Regan and Davey Goldman have successfully collaborated on several of Davey's P.I. cases. Certainly the bishop, brilliant and eccentric, has often surprised Davey, but never more so than when he agrees to help clear an accused man of murder. This accused man is none other than the mugger who sent Regan to the chair—the wheelchair, that is. An intriguing premise, a fair-play plot, and Davey's breezy narration make **Bishop's Revenge** (Donald I. Fine, \$20) solid entertainment. And if the characters remind you of Rex Stout's, I'm sure author William Love will simply smile and agree with you.

# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



**S**trictly speaking, **Falling Down** is a police procedural. In this movie, however, we know who's done it, who's doing it, and who's going to do it. The questions that remain: will he get caught, and why is he doing it?

The who in this crime story of sorts is Michael Douglas, who plays a cracked white-collar defense worker. For much of the film we don't even know his name—he's known as D-FENS, after his license plate.

We're introduced to Douglas in the middle of that daily urban quagmire, the traffic jam. He's stuck, he's steaming, and he's looking for an escape. Something snaps, and this guy simply bolts from his car, climbs an embankment, and disappears.

"Hey, where do you think you're going?" yells an incredulous fellow motorist.

"I'm going home," he answers.

On the same sweltering day a police detective is retiring—it's his last day on the job. Robert Duvall, as the cop, accepts his surroundings and laughs at them instead of cursing them like Douglas.

Our cracked defense worker finds himself bruised and battered by modern urban life, Los Angeles life in particular. Among his pet peeves are immigrants who speak with accents, high prices at corner markets, gang members, fast food joints, panhandlers, and just about anyone else who crosses his path.

Duvall's problems begin with a young daughter lost to illness and continue with a wife who has never recovered from that loss.

The descent into hell begins at a Korean market, where Douglas batters the store and terrorizes the owner with a baseball bat (the poor guy had difficulties with his words and

had the nerve to charge seventy-five cents for a can of soda).

At the cop shop, Duvall takes down the man's story. Later he gets involved in the questioning of a witness to a drive-by shooting. A suspect in both, he discovers, is a white man in a tie and white shirt, but since it's his last day, no one takes him seriously.

Along the way, the one-man wrecking crew trades in his bat for a gym bag full of serious looking guns.

Throughout the story, Douglas tells his victims and anyone else who'll listen that he just wants to go home. Home for him is his ex-wife's Venice Beach bungalow, where his daughter is having a birthday party. Despite a court restraining order, he is on his way there.

Duvall is also on his way home. He and his wife, played by Tuesday Weld, are set to retire to Arizona. It's pretty clear that he's doing it for her and would prefer to get out from behind his desk and do some real police work. On this day he gets his wish, thanks to D-FENS.

While there's certainly enough violence, mayhem, and bigotry to go around, *Falling Down* is surprisingly not strident. And it's not without its share of humor. Douglas shoots up a Whammyburger shop be-

cause his burger doesn't look as good as the one in the display photo. Who can't identify with that?

Douglas and Duvall eventually come face to face in an oceanside climax. Despite its police procedural angle, *Falling Down* is really a character study of this criminal and this cop. And while it's been obvious all along that the two will meet, the two journeys to that meeting are spellbinding.

Douglas once again proves he is a heavyweight actor. Lesser actors in his role would reduce this explosive film to nothing more than a slice 'em and dice 'em action film. Douglas engages the viewer's sympathy somehow, though we know he's doing the wrong thing.

Duvall, in his more reserved role, also gives a superior performance, and the supporting cast is first-rate. Former ingenue Tuesday Weld is downright creepy as the beleaguered Duvall's henpecking wife. Rachel Ticotin is lively and lovely as Duvall's only friend on the force, who accompanies him on the street, tracking down D-FENS. And Frederick Forrest is superb in his brief appearance as a Nazi-sympathizing army surplus store owner.

All in all, this Joseph Schumacher-directed movie is quite intriguing.

# THE STORY THAT WON



Photograph contest was won Station, Texas. Honorable of Johnstown, Pennsylvania; Arizona; Josephine Gonzales Canada; Carlton McCaslin of of Anaheim, California; Patricia R. Ferguson of Savannah, Georgia; Gail L. Rouskey of Ashland, Wisconsin; Katherine L. Olney of Schenectady, New York; Linda Mello of Fremont, California; Nancy Norris of Hobart, Indiana; Jeff Abbott of Austin, Texas; Alana LaValle of Ocean Springs, Mississippi; and Sam Feldman of Bayside, New York.

## SO MUCH AT STAKE! by Frank Peirce

My brother Ham could talk me into anything, even if it was against my own best interests. And he beat me at games, even though I cheated.

Ham talked me into betting my share of our inheritance on a game of horseshoes, though he was a far better pitcher, often knocking my ringers from around the stake.

We played using Ham's rules. Both players' horseshoes were given points. Ringers counted five points; leaners, three; all others, one.

Most of the game, I led. With a million dollars at stake, Ham was nervous, missed throws he ordinarily made blindfolded. I thought I was going to win going away. Then he settled down—and everything changed. His horseshoes drove mine into the ground, burying them. Literally. Going into the last inning he led 45-44.

My first horseshoe hit the stake, curling around it, a ringer. Ham's kicked my horseshoe away and ended a leaner. The score was 48-45, his favor.

My second horseshoe was another ringer, giving me fifty points and the game—unless Ham's horseshoe kicked mine away or ended at least a leaner.

With so much at stake, I cheated. I poured Krazy Glue on Ham's horseshoe.

Ham picked it up, aimed, threw, and soared through the air, burying himself in the ground.

The judge ruled Ham the winner. His right foot touched the stake, giving him a second leaner and fifty-one points. I didn't argue. I'm Ham's sole beneficiary.

# ALFRED HITCHCOCK AND ELLERY QUEEN MYSTERY MAGAZINES

## COMBO CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to DELL MAGAZINES  
Classified Advertising Department 15th Floor  
1540 Broadway New York, N.Y. 10036

**15 WORD MINIMUM**  
Only \$72.00 for 15 Words or Less  
\$4.80 each additional word  
Capitalized words add—60¢ per word  
**SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS**  
**SAME COPY ORDER**

**DEADLINE:** Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the fourth preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME \_\_\_\_\_

FIRM (NAME IN AD) \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

YOUR SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

Words at \$4.80 each \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Capitalized word at 60¢ each \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Total amount for 1 ad \$ \_\_\_\_\_

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total \$ \_\_\_\_\_ x 3 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

(b) Multiply total amount on above line by  $\frac{1}{3}$  x .85

(c) Total amount for 3 ads \$ \_\_\_\_\_

(Example: One 15 word ad \$72.00 x 3  
months = \$216.00 x .85 = \$183.60)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed for \_\_\_\_\_ insertion(s) in the \_\_\_\_\_ issue(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Heading \_\_\_\_\_

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(11) \$72.00	(2) \$72.00	(3) \$72.00	(4) \$72.00	(5) \$72.00
(6) \$72.00	(7) \$72.00	(8) \$72.00	(9) \$72.00	(10) \$72.00
(11) \$72.00	(12) \$72.00	(13) \$72.00	(14) \$72.00	(15) \$72.00
(16) \$76.80	(17) \$81.60	(18) \$86.40	(19) \$91.20	(20) \$96.00
(21) \$100.80	(22) \$105.60	(23) \$110.40	(24) \$115.20	(25) \$120.00
(26) \$124.80	(27) \$129.60	(28) \$134.40	(29) \$139.20	(30) \$144.00

**HOW TO COUNT WORDS:** Name and address must be included in counting the number of words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word. Mark Holly, 1540 Broadway New York, New York, 10036. 5 WORDS. Zip codes are not counted. Phone # 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for City or State count as 1 word each. Garden City, New York, 1 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A., 7 x 10, 35mm count as 1 word (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words). Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling compound words, hyphens, abbreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to Dell Magazines**

# CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE

AH JULY '93

HITCHCOCK/QUEEN combination CLASSIFIED AD rate is \$4.80 per word—payable in advance (\$72.00 minimum). Capitalized words 60¢ per word additional. To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to Judy Dorman, DELL MAGAZINES, 1540 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10036.

## ADDITIONAL INCOME

GET PAID FOR READING BOOKS! \$100 per book. Send name, address to: Calco Publishing (Dept. C-337), 500 South Broad, Meriden, CT 06450.

## AUTHOR'S SERVICES

## HOW TO PUBLISH YOUR BOOK

Join our successful authors in a complete and reliable publishing program: publicity, advertising, handsome books. Speedy, efficient service. Send for FREE manuscript report & copy of Publish Your Book.

CARLTON PRESS Dept SMH  
11 West 32 St. New York, 10001

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK NOW! Your book can be published and promoted by the leading subsidy book publisher. Send for free booklet HP-5. Vantage Press, 516 W. 34th St., New York, NY 10001.

Agent interested in unpublished manuscripts, fiction. Query/Sase, Writer's Literary Service, Box 575, Exton, PA 19341.

## AUTHOR'S SERVICES —Cont'd

COMPLETE AUTHOR SERVICE - For details send Sase to J. Sandars, 940 Royal St., #252, New Orleans, LA 70116.

## BOOKS & PERIODICALS

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Natchez, ND 58265-0133.

ANNOTATED lists of new mysteries. Also used mystery catalog. Rue Morgue, 946 Pearl, Boulder, CO 80302. Order any in-print mystery: 1-800-356-5586.

MYSTERY ADDICTS! Free catalogue! New and Recycled Detective Fiction. Grave Matters, Box 32192-C, Cincinnati, OH 45232, 513-242-7527.

FREE Catalogue of used and collectable detective fiction, Dunn and Powell Books, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, Maine 04609.

FREE used mysteries catalog. No Tie Required, Box 9592, Cedar Rapids, IA 52409. 319-363-7708.

**YOU'LL MAKE  
MONEY**

**SAVE MONEY TOO—  
BY READING and ANSWERING  
THESE CLASSIFIED ADS**

AH JULY '93

# Classified Continued

## BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

FREE Catalog. Used hardbound and paperback mystery fiction. Books West, Box 417760, Sacramento, CA 95841.

MANUSCRIPTS WANTED, all types. Company with 70-year tradition. "Author's Guide to Subsidy Publishing." 1-800-695-9599.

Past issues of EOMM and AHMM magazines available. Free Catalog. APB Magazines, PO Box 214997, Sacramento, CA 95821.

## BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

WE'LL PAY YOU TO TYPE NAMES AND ADDRESSES FROM HOME. \$500.00 PER 1000. Call 1-900-896-1666 (\$1.49 min/18 yrs. +) or Write: PASSE-XAH793, 161 S. Lincolnway, N. Aurora, IL 60542.

## CATALOGS AND DIRECTORIES

CRYSTAL Balls, Jewelry, send for free catalog. Anderson's, 3304 Yorba Linda Blvd., #392, Fullerton, CA 92631.

## EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets. Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, New Bern, NC 28563.

## FOR SALE MISCELLANEOUS

FREE STORY! PUZZLE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, fiction quarterly. SASE for story or \$20.00 for 1/yr subscription. 2903-AH Fernan Terrace, CDA, ID 83814-5853.

## INVENTORS

RECEIVE your FREE Information Kit about PATENTING and MARKETING New product ideas. The Concept Network, Professional and Inexpensive services. 1-800-835-2246 Ext. 197. Call now!

## MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

GUARANTEED INCOME! Innovative marketing concept. For complete information send \$5.00 and Sase to: Anderson Marketing, PO Box 671, Brick, NJ 08723.

## MYSTERIES

FREE CATALOGS, Mystery, Hardcover, Vintage Paperbacks. Ed McDonald's Mostly Mystery, 111 Boston Avenue, Stratford, CT 06497.

## PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people. 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, MI 48068.

BEAUTIFUL BRITISH LADIES & ELIGIBLE BRITISH GENTLEMEN seek friendship, romance & marriage with American ladies & gentlemen! ALL ages! Free details: ENGLISH ROSE INTRODUCTION AGENCY, (Dept. D/P), 2nd Floor, Mill Lane House, Mill Lane, Margate, Kent, ENGLAND TEL: 01144-843-290735.

GAY Contacts! Write: MM Inc. P.O. Box P(W), Conway, New Hampshire 03818.

**YOU'LL MAKE  
MONEY**

**SAVE MONEY TOO—  
BY READING and ANSWERING  
THESE CLASSIFIED ADS**



# Classified Continued

AH JULY '93

## PERSONAL—Cont'd

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP, MARRIAGE. American-Mexican-Oriental. Free Photos. Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista CA 91912 (619) 425-1716.

FREE photos! Meet pretty Mexican ladies. World, Box 7358DD, Moreno Valley, CA 92552. Call 1-800-643-7309.

TRADITIONAL ORIENTAL WIVES! Presentations by American husband, Filipino wife. Since 1984. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948. (415) 897-2742.

COMPUTERIZED HANDWRITING ANALYSIS. Mail 100 words and signature. \$25 check or money order. Positech Ltd., Box 16, Site 11, R.R. 4, Stony Plain AB, Canada, T0E 2G0.

## TAPES & CASSETTES & CDs

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

LET'S WRITE FICTION. Ralph McInerney, creator of Father Dowling, on audio tape, 8 lessons, booklet, album, \$19.95 + \$2 p&h. Visa/Mastercard. Box 495, Notre Dame, IN 46556 or 1-800-852-9962.

FINALLY! Educational horse videos that tell all about horses. Includes: Breeds, Colors, Buying, Care, Medical Needs and much more. VHS only \$64.95 per set. Item, EA1105, 1-800-525-3166. Char, Mid-Video, P.O. Box 1615, Buford, GA 30518.

## For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:

Combo #1, Combo #2, Combo #3

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

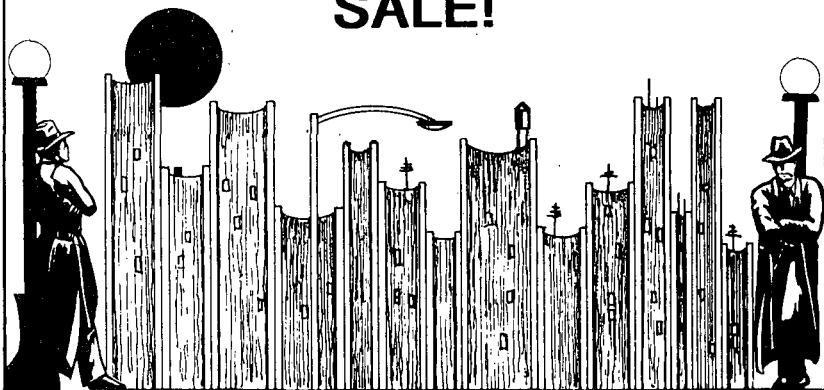
Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.

For further information write to Judy Dorman  
Dell Magazines, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036.

**YOU'LL MAKE  
MONEY**

**SAVE MONEY TOO—  
BY READING and ANSWERING  
THESE CLASSIFIED ADS**

# ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S ANTHOLOGY WAREHOUSE SALE!



Join us in our first anthology warehouse sale with great savings! For only \$12.95 (includes postage and handling), you will receive five classic Alfred Hitchcock anthologies. Our warehouse is packed with anthologies that will provide you with hours of great reading. Act quickly...this sale is for a limited time.

Please send your name and address with your check or money order for \$12.95 to:

**Alfred Hitchcock  
P.O. Box 40  
Vernon, NJ 07462**

MZNH-5

While we cannot accommodate requests for specific anthologies, we guarantee that you will be delighted with your surprise assortment.

Available only in the US and Canada. Canadian orders please add \$4.00 (US funds only). Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

# ELLERY QUEEN

THE WORLD LEADING  
MYSTERY MAGAZINE



**THE BUTLER DID IT?  
STAY TUNED...SUBSCRIBE NOW  
AND FIND OUT WHODUNIT!**

To receive **18 issues** for only **\$28.97** (you save 25%) or **12 issues** for **\$19.97**, subscribe today!

**CALL TOLL FREE 1-800-333-3053**

or

Mail to: Queen, P.O. Box 7052, Red Oak, IA 51591

Outside U.S. & Poss., 18 issues for \$39.97, 12 issues for \$27.97 (U.S. funds only). Canadian orders include GST.

Please allow four to six weeks for delivery of your first issue. We publish two double issues, in March and October. These count as two each towards your subscription.

MZNC-6

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# MAIL ORDER MALL



▼ **HANDCRAFTED  
READY MADE QUILT**

A true American folk tradition, quilt making was a favorite pastime in the 1800's when one quilt could take years to make and was passed on from one generation to another. In recent years, handmade quilts have soared in popularity. We offer the Double Wedding Ring, one of the most popular designs calling to mind the traditions surrounding marriage, home

and family. Our quilt is offered in 3 sizes with matching shams and ready made 16 inch square pillow. Twin Quilt (68"x86") \$99.98 (S450) #A2006. Full/Queen Quilt (86"x86") \$159.98 (S450) #A2007. King Quilt (100"x90") \$199.98 (S500) #A2008. Single Sham (20"x26") \$29.98 (S350) #A2009. Pillow (16"x16") \$19.98 (S350) #A2010.

**TO ORDER:** Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL DEPT 073 AH**, P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE 1-800-722-9999. NJ residents add 7% sales tax. We honor MasterCard, Visa, and American Express. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. **30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund.**